



Travel Tips for those with Pituitary Illness

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Patients with pituitary disease should plan ahead before overseas travel and should see their treating doctors well in advance of their departure.

It is important to see your GP, as they will be familiar with travel recommendations. These include updating ones vaccinations including for example fluvax, tetanus, hepatitis etc and checking for any vaccinations that may be necessary for the countries you are travelling to. GPs will often provide a script for an antinauseant and an antidiarrhoeal, as stomach upsets are common when travelling overseas. If you do not have a regular GP there are GPs listed that just specialise in advising patients regarding overseas travel.

The main risk for patients with hypopituitarism (on full replacement therapy including steroids) when they are overseas, is that of an intercurrent illness (eg. cold, flu, infection). Patients should already be aware that they need to double or even triple their dose of steroid (ie. cortate - cortisone acetate) or hysone (hydrocortisone). No harm will usually come from increasing the doses for a few days or until the illness settles. If the patient has a vomiting illness and can't take their steroids they need to have an injection of hydrocortisone. This can be given intramuscularly or intravenously. In Australia it is part of the standard doctor's bag list of medications but this may not apply overseas. Most hotels will have access to a local doctor but if a patient is very sick with a vomiting illness they are best to organise transport to the nearest hospital.

Patients should ensure that they take enough medication with them for the duration of their travel. Doctors can organise increased quantities for you under Regulation 24, which lets you get prescription repeats dispensed at the same time as the original script. Most oral medications are stable at room temperature and do not need to be insulated for overseas travel. The usual recommendation is they should be kept below 25°C ie. not left in the sun! Recently it has been recommended that thyroxine (Oroxine, Eutroxig) be stored in the fridge, but the tablets can be kept at room temperature for up to a month. Some injectable preparations eg Growth Hormone, Lanreotide, Sandostatin LAR need to be kept between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius and patients should check the product information with their doctor or pharmacist.

Hydrocortisone (Solu-Cortef) for injection, is available on prescription and I would recommend it for patients travelling overseas in general and especially if going to remote areas. It is given as an intramuscular injection into the outer part of the thigh. It will provide adequate steroid cover for up to 6 hours so that the patient can get to emergency care. It comes as an "Act-O-Vial" system that enables the diluent (fluid) to be mixed with the powder (hydrocortisone) which then has to be drawn up with a needle and syringe. Patients should ensure they know how to use it and have the needle and syringe, which are not part of the prescription but can be obtained from your GP.

If travelling overseas patients must ensure they adhere to the regulations of the airlines and the countries they are travelling to. This is particularly important if travelling with needles and syringes. Patients can check with their travel agents and the embassies/consulates of the countries involved. It is very important to have a travel letter from your doctor documenting your medical conditions and medications you take. Most doctors' computers will print this out. I usually add to the letter that if the patient is sick and vomiting and goes to hospital they should have hydrocortisone 100mg intravenously and rehydration with intravenous normal saline. This helps to speed up the patients being assessed in an emergency department.

To minimise the risk of gastric upset patients should be careful about the water they drink and the food they eat. The usual recommendations apply.

You must ensure you have adequate medical insurance before you travel overseas usually organised via your travel agent. You should disclose all your medical conditions as nondisclosure may invalidate your insurance with very costly repercussions.

The good news is that most patients do not have major medical problems when travelling overseas. Planning ahead gives peace of mind and most patients have a safe and uneventful trip overseas. Carrying a medical condition with you in some ways just adds to the adventure.



Useful Websites

General Travel Advice:

Australian Government: Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Smartraveller: -
Travel Advisories: - <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/>

Travel tips including insurances etc: - <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/travelwell.html>

Travel publications:- http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/order_brochure.html

Medicare: - http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/yourhealth/going_overseas/to.htm or by phoning the Travelling with PBS medicine enquiry line: 1800 500 147.

Check that your medications are legal in the country you are visiting:

Australian Government: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: The Diplomatic and Consular Corps
<http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/protocol> Consular Duty Officer: Ph: 02 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135

Tips for travelling with medicine:

Australian Government: Therapeutic Drugs Administration:- Ph: 02 6289 3200
<http://www.tga.gov.au/docs/html/bringmed/outaust.htm/travellers>

Preparing for a flight:

Australian Government: Civil Aviation Safety Authority: -: <http://www.casa.gov.au/airsafe/trip/>
Qantas:- <http://www.qantas.com.au/info/flying/inTheAir/yourHealthInflight>

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2009