

TRAVEL TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH KIDNEY FAILURE



Kidney failure can make travelling difficult but not impossible. You may be able to attend work and social events or enjoy a great holiday with careful planning.

If you are thinking about travelling, it is important to first speak to your health care team about the effect that this might have on your health. If you are well enough, a holiday can be a big boost to your confidence and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, even if you are medically able to travel, it is often difficult to find a renal unit that takes casual clients. The number of people with kidney failure is growing at 6% per year so there is increasing demand for haemodialysis places. The renal units support kidney patients whenever possible but sometimes they do not have any spare places. Private renal units may charge a fee for each treatment.

MAKING TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Here are a few tips to help you make your travel successful.

1. Talk to your health care team about your travel plans before doing anything else. Your renal units should help you organise your dialysis at another centre.
2. It is important to plan your travel well ahead of time. Decide the times/days you want to dialyse. Most units run on tight schedules so you may need to be flexible about the dates of your visit. Let the renal nurse who is helping with your planning know if you cannot dialyse on some days.
3. Ask your health care team where renal units are located. This information is also available on Kidney Health Australia's web site.
4. Check with the visiting renal unit as soon as you arrive to confirm your appointment time. You may also want to visit the new unit before dialysis and meet the staff to feel more comfortable. Phone the unit before you visit.
5. A transfer form (ask your renal unit will be sent to your destination unit and you need to carry a copy with you when travelling. Your Renal Unit will advise you
6. If travelling in an emergency, dialysis details can be faxed ahead.

Kidney Health Australia also have some other fact sheets that are helpful when you are travelling, including 'Questions to ask before a short term stay', 'Short term stays' and 'Dialysis Summary'.

TRAVELLING OVERSEAS

These are a few hints to help make your overseas travel successful.

- Talk to your health care team about travel plans before doing anything else.
- Find out about medical costs in advance. Check if there is a Medical Payment Agreement with Australia through Medicare. There is a Medicare brochure called 'Your health care while travelling overseas'.
- Ask your health care team for contact details of doctors or hospital you can contact for medical help in case of an emergency.
- Take enough medication with you for the whole trip, with some extra in case of lost luggage or a spillage. Make sure you put your medication and prescriptions in your carry-on luggage.
- It's a good idea to carry spare written prescriptions with you. You will need to find out if you need a different type of prescription in other countries.
- Remember to stretch for a few minutes every 1 hour while travelling to increase circulation and reduce the risk of leg swelling and clots.
- Haemodialysis in other countries is possible and Kidney Health Australia's website has a list of international renal units on the web links page. Be aware that the standard of care may not be the same in all countries.
- Peritoneal dialysis is easier but you need to plan ahead and arrange for back-up medical care. Carry medical supplies with you for the whole trip plus extras or arrange for supplies to be delivered ahead of time. If pre-ordering, ensure supplies have arrived at your destination before starting out. Arrange a clean space to do exchanges and store supplies.

TRAVELLING WHILE ON THE TRANSPLANT WAITING LIST

Yes, this is possible too. Consult with your doctor and inform your transplant co-ordinator about your travel plans. The co-ordinator can help you to decide whether you will be able to return in time if a kidney becomes available.

STICKING TO A DIET WHILE TRAVELLING

Part of the fun of travelling is trying new food but it is important to stick to your diet. Your dietitian can suggest food choices for your trip. Other tips include:

- For short trips, pack a lunch to eat along the way rather than stopping for fast foods.
- If staying with friends and family, send information about your diet. You can make some suggestions about dishes that everyone can enjoy.
- Choose a hotel that offers a kitchen so you can prepare your own meals.
- Choose restaurants that offer a wide variety of choices when eating out.

HOME DIALYSIS PATIENTS TRAVELLING

Patient Associations such as Dialysis and Transplant Association (DATA) in Victoria, Renal Association of New South Wales and Queensland Renal Association Incorporated (QRAI) have holiday home facilities available for rent by members.

DIABETIC PATIENTS TRAVELLING

Since the unexpected happens and meals can be delayed, carry glucose tablets and appropriate snacks such as low-potassium juice boxes to treat low blood sugar. It is a good idea to travel with a packed lunch or a nutritional supplement in case of delays. Managing your diabetes can be made simpler by having insulin, syringes and blood glucose monitoring supplies handy.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel insurance policies vary and often have limitations and exclusions relating to pre-existing medical conditions. Shop around to find a company, which offers reasonable insurance for people with pre-existing conditions such as kidney failure and compare the policies carefully. You may want to read Kidney Health Australia's fact sheet Travel Insurance.

CRUISES AND RESORTS

The Dialysis Escape Line offers cruises for people on dialysis. They have fully equipped haemodialysis units on board and qualified medical staff. You can call 08 8227 0181 or 0404 899 540 or email dela@chariot.net.au

PRIVATE CLINICS

There are also resorts around the world for people on dialysis with units and qualified personnel who can cater for your special dietary needs. See 'Dialysis, Travel and Relocation Sites' on the Kidney Links page of Kidney Health Australia's website <http://www.kidney.org.au/?section=2&subsection=248>

For more information about kidney health or this topic, please contact the Australian Kidney Foundation:

Kidney Information Line (free call) on 1800 682 531 or visit website

www.kidney.org.au

This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or health professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the health professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or health professional.

Reviewed June 05