



## Traveling With Asthma

### Planning

Make an appointment with your physician for a health assessment and to discuss what to do if you have asthma symptoms. Ensure that you have a written asthma action plan, to help guide you in the event of worsening asthma symptoms. Have the doctor write clear instructions that can be given to a emergency room staff, should the need arise. Keep these instructions in a secure place along with your doctor's contact information. If you are travelling with someone, ensure they are familiar with your asthma and its treatment.

### It is not wise to travel when your asthma is unstable

All immunizations should be current, as well as those that are necessary for the particular destination. Consider seeking the advice from a regional travel clinic or health department before your vacation. If you are receiving regular allergy shots, discuss your travel plans with your allergist.

Obtain pollen counts at your destination from either your allergist, or a weather channel, or website on the internet.

Calculate how much of your medication you will need to cover the full duration of your trip. Take all your medications in their original containers. Of course, along with the medications, take any necessary devices such as spacers or a valved holding chamber and peak flow meter.

Discuss having a supply of emergency medications with your doctor.

Inquire and shop around for travel health insurance early. Some insurance companies do not cover individuals with asthma. Cancellation insurance for airline tickets does NOT apply to pre-existing conditions such as asthma. This means you are not insured if you miss a flight due to an asthma attack. Read your policy closely.

Consider purchasing a *Medic Alert* bracelet or pendant, as it will allow for easy access to your medical information in a time of need.



## Transportation

Have your asthma well controlled long before your trip.

When travelling in your own car, you have control over the indoor air quality. You can eliminate or limit smoking and exposure odours from perfumes and solvents from cleaning products. It is not possible to control such exposure if travelling in a public transportation system such as in an airplane, a bus or train. Do not store your medications in the glove box as it may become too hot or too cold and affect their function.

Travelling by bus in a third world country will often lead to exposures to second hand tobacco smoke, dust, diesel exhaust fumes, animal dander and perfumes, to name just a few triggers.

North American flights are now all non-smoking. However, there are still airlines in certain parts of the world that allow in-flight smoking. If you have to go on a flight that allows smoking, ask for a seat that is farthest from the smoking sections.

The air on an airplane is very dry so make sure you drink plenty of non-alcoholic drinks before and during the flight. Breathe through your nose, as it filters, humidifies and warms the air before it reaches your lungs.

The pressure inside an airplane cabin can cause significant pain if you have rhinitis, sinusitis or an ear infection. If you anticipate severe ear or sinus pain, take a decongestant one hour before departure. In flight, chew gum or drink water regularly as swallowing may help decrease the pain. When flying, use saline nasal spray once every hour if necessary to keep your nasal membranes moist.

Bring your asthma medication with you onto the plane, bus or train, as well as any devices that you will need. It's a good idea to keep one set of medications in your carry-on bag, and another in your checked-in baggage, in case one set gets lost.



## **Destination**

Learn as much as possible about your destination beforehand. Will you have easy access to medical facilities? Will the weather be hot or cold? What are the seasonal allergens in the area? Is there smog?

Asthma attacks can occur anywhere at anytime but are less likely to happen if the condition is well controlled prior to going. It is always important to know where the nearest hospital is and the fastest way to get there.

If pollution is a major trigger for you, it may be wise to avoid places like Los Angeles and Mexico City, Hong Kong, London. Streets may not be paved in some places, producing very dusty conditions. In high altitude areas, such as the Himalayas and the Andes, there is less oxygen pressure leading to the possibility of developing Acute Mountain Sickness (also called High Altitude Illness). Drink a lot of water if you are going to a high altitude place.

## **Accommodations**

Will you be exposed to tobacco smoke? Will you be exposed to animal dander?

Breakfast places may have pets (cats, dogs, birds) roaming around, smokers, fireplaces, wood-burning stoves, as well as down-filled pillows and covers.

Will you be sleeping in a room that is damp? Dust mites and mould grow readily in warm humid climates. Older places can have more moulds and dust mites. Ask to see the room before checking in; moulds can sometimes be identified by a musty smell.

It is a good idea to bring your own allergen-proof pillow and blanket. In rare cases, more often in North America, a hotel may have “environmentally sensitive” rooms. You may wish to call the hotel in advance to see if non-smoking, environmentally sensitive rooms are available. Ensure that the hotel does not allow pets and is away from busy highways and industrial centres.

Cottages are a common place for moulds and dust, especially if they have been closed for the winter. Asthmatics should not participate in opening up the cottage, and it should be cleaned and aired out before the asthmatic arrives.

- When making hotel reservations, ask if there are allergy-proof rooms available. If you are sensitive to moulds, request a sunny, dry room away from areas near indoor pools or hot tubs.
- If you have an allergy to dander, it is best to avoid staying in the homes of family or friends who own a pet.
- Try to avoid second-hand cigarette smoke by staying in a non-smoking household.