

## Travelling with Asthma

Travel, either interstate or overseas, should not present any problems for someone with asthma provided you take all the necessary pre-travel precautions.

Even travel to high altitudes, trekking, sightseeing or skiing is safe as long as your asthma is well managed at sea level. Some travellers will seek advice from a travel doctor BEFORE they finalise their travel arrangements.

## Asthma and Altitude

David Schlim – a doctor who worked in Nepal for many, many years reports the following:

*Despite the fact that some people with asthma are provoked by cold and exercise, the vast majority of people with asthma do quite well at altitude. Asthma exacerbations are exceedingly rare at high altitude in Nepal, and no one has ever been evacuated from high altitude due to an asthma attack. There is also no evidence that people with a history of asthma are more prone to acute mountain sickness.*

*There are a scattering of reports that show that people with asthma do better after being transported to a higher altitude, which has been attributed to fewer allergens in the air.*

However, all people with asthma who travel to a remote area should have the full spectrum of asthma treatments available to them, depending on their history of exacerbations.

## Pre Travel

When you visit your TRAVEL DOCTOR for pre-travel advice, they may recommend extra vaccines e.g. Flu Vaccine and Pneumonia Vaccine. Make sure your travel insurance covers asthma.

Discuss your 'asthma management plan' with your usual doctor. A written plan details a staged approach to treating any deterioration in your asthma.

Carry a letter from your usual doctor outlining.

1. Details of your medical condition.
2. Current medication including generic name, strength, and frequency of dose.
3. Copy of any important investigations/ breathing tests e.g. or spirometry or peak flow.
4. Details of any treatments that may be required.

Find out where you can obtain medical advice in the places you visit. Carry the phone number of your travel insurance company. They will assist in the event you need medical care while overseas.

Your medical kit should include:

- Adequate supplies of your usual medications plus some extra.
- Consider taking antibiotics in case of chest infection.
- Consider taking medication to have on hand in case your asthma worsens e.g. inhaled or oral steroids.
- The usual Travellers medical supplies appropriate to the destination.

A spacer may be preferable to a nebuliser when travelling because it is cheap, portable and effective. If you require a nebulizer pump, special planning for voltages, power point adapters, etc is necessary.

## While you are away

Carry your medication with you at all times. In case some of your luggage goes astray, carry spare medication in another bag.

Any dietary or lifestyle modifications you follow at home should be continued while you are away.

Try to avoid known triggers for your asthma. Some asthma is triggered by dusts and pollens, or cold, dry air. For example, you may wish to limit your exercise in dusty environments. Some asthma is triggered by respiratory infection. Avoid those known to be ill, and wash your hands after personal contact.

Watch for early signs of deterioration and seek medical attention early.

### **Signs of worsening asthma**

- Increasing symptoms e.g. cough, wheeze or breathlessness.
- Increasing need for bronchodilators e.g. Ventolin.
- Lack of response to increasing doses of bronchodilators.
- Falling Peak Flow rates ( as measured by peak flow meter )

Remember that oral steroids may take 6 hours to start working. If you are in areas remote from medical care (e.g. trekking ) steroids should be started sooner rather than later....To reiterate, when travelling, OVER treatment is safer than UNDER treatment.

Be prepared and have a great time!