



Escaping the doldrums with a safe and satisfying winter vacation

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Finding the Sun

If February is the shortest month, why does it often feel so long? Maybe it's the cold temperatures, the cloudy skies, the rain, the sleet, the snow—**need we go on?**

[According to the Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), **cold weather can stress your body**, causing it to release hormones like cortisol for an extra energy boost. Cortisol reduces insulin production, which can result in a blood sugar spike.

Exercising, at least outdoors, can become harder in the winter, which may lead to weight gain. And many people with diabetes (as in the general population) suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) as circadian rhythms shift with shorter days, causing fatigue, depression and [carbohydrate cravings](#).

So, if you're looking for an excuse to vacation in a warmer climate, taking care of your health could be the reason you need.

Where to Go

The world may be your oyster, but considerations of time, budget and access to healthy food and medical care do apply. **A few suggestions:**

TAKE A CRUISE. Plenty of cruise lines offer great deals on week-long winter cruises to the **Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and other temperate spots**. One advantage of cruise ships is that, with the exception of day excursions, you can return quickly to your diabetes supplies should

you need them. [Medical care](#) is also available on every cruise ship. You can find plenty of salads, lean meats, fresh fruit and veggies, as well as, generally, a gym or walking track to visit daily. However, be forewarned: if you feel you cannot avoid the **unhealthy (but quite tempting)** food options and alcoholic drinks that abound on cruise ships, this choice is probably not for you.

A BEACH VACATION. A trip to the beach in the southern United States, Hawaii, Puerto Rico or the Bahamas could be just the break you need. Beaches are great places for exercise—**swimming, running, hiking or biking**—and with a little research, you can find the locales that offer the healthiest foods and best medical care options. If you intend to be out in the sun most of the day, drink plenty of fluids, wear a hat, put on sunscreen and seek frequent shade breaks to avoid dehydration that can affect your glucose levels.

SPAIN, ITALY OR GREECE. A winter vacation to a Mediterranean county can provide fascinating sightseeing as well as access to the **healthy Mediterranean diet**—fish, fresh vegetables, plenty of olive oil and (in moderation) good wine. As with any trip abroad, try to alleviate jet lag (which can raise blood sugar levels) by going to bed when the country you are visiting is going to bed. This may mean forcing yourself not to nap that first day, but it will be worth it in the end.



Travel Tips

No matter where you're going, there are strategies to make the journey easier, so you **arrive at your destination unfrazzled and ready to go.**

Diabetes ID

Bring a bracelet or medical ID card that identifies you as a person with diabetes, just in case. Always carry a doctor's letter describing your condition—this should explain that you are carrying certain medications, and why. Take copies of your prescriptions, so you can show a doctor in a foreign country the precise type and quantity of medication you need.

TSA PreCheck

If you don't have it, TSA PreCheck is well worth the \$78-\$85 fee (depending on which enrollment center you use) and is good for five years of flying. It's much easier and less time-consuming to go through the special security entrances marked with the blue TSA PRE check mark. You don't have to take off your shoes or remove your laptop from its bag. This gives you more time to

engage the security personnel in case you're wearing an insulin pump and decide you want to be patted down rather than go through the scanner. (Note: Whether you do TSA Pre or not, check with your pump manufacturer to see if you can wear your device through the scanner—some recommend against it.)

Time Zones and Insulin

If you're crossing multiple time zones, timing your insulin injections can be a little tricky, so check with your healthcare provider for advice. Wearing an insulin pump makes things easier—while crossing time zones in the plane, simply change the date and time on your pump to that time zone. When you land, change it again to local time. It's always important when traveling, however, to keep a close eye on your blood sugar and adjust as needed.



Do your homework—and enjoy!

Doing a bit of prep beforehand can make your winter vacation so **much more relaxing.**

You can find out (often from blogs and websites by people with diabetes) whether a destination has emergency care readily available. [You can go online and examine menus](#) in restaurants you'd like to visit and use your carb counter to check the carbs of certain dishes ahead of time. And you can scope out the best places to exercise—gyms that offer one day passes, bikes or running trails—so you don't fall behind while you're away.

Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/articles/managing-diabetes-cold-weather.html> | <https://home.dartmouth.edu/news/2023/09/glucose-data-reveals-seasonal-patterns-diabetes-care> | <https://www.thatdiabeticgirl.com/blog/travelling-with-diabetes> | <https://www.healthandfitnesstravel.com/blog/where-and-how-to-travel-on-holiday-with-diabetes> | <https://diabetes.org/advocacy/know-your-rights/what-special-concerns-may-arise> | <https://www.adwdiabetes.com/articles/3-diabetes-friendly-vacation>

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