Traveling with your child with IBD

Dealing with Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis while traveling can be challenging and stressful, but individuals who prepare adequately can maintain more control over their circumstances while away from home. Being prepared and feeling in control helps people to relax—a common yet sometimes elusive goal for vacationers—especially those with a chronic and unpredictable disease. Use of advanced planning and practical on-the-go strategies increase the chances that a vacation will be fun and enjoyable for an individual with IBD. Please print the following tips that may be distributed to your patients who will be traveling:

TIP #1: Start early to assemble all of the information that you may need while away

- Names and phone numbers for all of your child’s GI health care providers should be in your smart phone and/or other devices in case of an emergency or a flare.

- Before traveling abroad, ask your child’s health care provider or contact the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT) for names of physicians in the cities you plan to visit. (see link below)

- If you are traveling to an area of the world that requires special vaccinations, discuss the risks with your health care provider, and obtain medically-related information from IAMAT or the [http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel) for the vaccinations that are required. If you are on immunosuppressant medications, such as immunomodulators or biologics, then you should avoid LIVE vaccines such as typhoid and yellow fever. There is a tab which offers helpful hints for a family traveling with children.

- International organizations dedicated to Crohn’s and colitis could be a great source of information regarding the resources available in the country you will visit—contact the [Crohn's & Colitis Foundation IBD Help Center](http://www.ccf.org) for a list of these international organizations.

- Before traveling, discuss with your child’s GI health care provider a plan of action for a flare while traveling.

- A typed statement from your child's GI health care provider, describing your medical history and the drugs you are taking, will be helpful if customs officials question you or if an emergency arises.
If your child is using injectable medication, you may want to have a letter from your child's health care provider that you can carry with you through security.

Before traveling on trains or buses, find out about the availability of bathrooms onboard.

Before committing to an airline reservation, check to see if you will be able to reserve a seat on the aisle near the bathroom.

When mapping a road trip, check with AAA or trip planning guides for rest stops along the way.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has a webpage specifically for travelers with medical conditions. Check it out before you embark on air travel, because you may need to make a verbal or written declaration of any liquid medication or nutrition supplement in excess of 3.4 ounces or 100 ml.

Download UOAA’s (United Ostomy Association of America) Travel Communication Card as an aid in dealing with airline security.

If traveling to a foreign country, it is a good idea to have critical ostomy information written in the local language. International Ostomy Association may be of help with this translation as well as with locating supplies while visiting abroad.

**TIP #2:** Prepare for your trip by carefully assembling all of the supplies you will need

- The diet that works for your child at home should dictate your meal plans while travelling, so don’t become a victim of circumstances. Take packable dry foods, like oatmeal and nutrition bars and packets of electrolyte supplements.

- Always travel with your own toilet paper, soothing wipes, ointments and changes of underwear and extra clothes.

- Keep hand sanitizer handy in small bottles that can go through airport security, if applicable.

- If possible, bring enough of your child’s medication to last throughout your trip. If it is not possible, due to refrigeration or other issues, prepare in advance for obtaining medications while away from home. It may be helpful to contact the manufacturer to see if the medication is
sold in the country you will be visiting. The IBD Help Center is a resource for individualized travel suggestions—(see links below).

- Beware of exotic foods. Your child's digestive system may not easily handle such changes in diet, so check with his/her GI Provider before you leave if you want to sample the local cuisine.

- Be knowledgeable of some basic language in the country you are visiting: especially phrases like “Where is the bathroom?” or words like “hospital, pharmacy or doctor”.

- It is a good idea to take along a copy of your child’s prescription (including generic names - as the brand names can be different from country to country) just in case you need further supplies or medications.

- If traveling to remote areas, consider asking your child's GI provider for an “emergency” prescription of steroids or antibiotics to fill and take with you just in case you flare and do not have access to healthcare.

- Always pack your child’s medications and ostomy supplies to be carried with you on the airplane.

- If you have an ostomy, pre-cut all pouches at home, as you may wish to avoid having scissors in your carry-on luggage. Pack ostomy supplies in at least 2 places—carry on and checked luggage. Take extra supplies in case you are stranded where supplies may not be available.

- Keep your child’s medications in original containers—use pillboxes to carry small amounts needed during the course of a day—obtain the appropriate storage container for medications that must remain cool while traveling. Manufacturers may be able to provide free travel packs for keeping medications cool, but check to see how long the travel packs remain effective at cooling.

- Take bottled water with you, if it will be your only source of safe drinking water while away.

- Do not forget sunscreen and lip balm—certain medications such as sulfasalazine may cause photosensitivity so sunscreen is even more important for these children.
**TIP #3:** While you are away, take steps to ensure ease of travel, comfort, health, and safety

- If your child has an ostomy, alert security personnel at checkpoints at airports. They are trained to anticipate and respond to medical needs while they are screening travelers. Ostomy supplies are permitted through security checkpoints.

- Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate. Traveling often can dehydrate a child if she/he is not drinking adequately. When the weather is hot, hydration is especially important—aim for at least 8 full glasses of water a day. Use G2 energy drinks or Pedialyte® to rehydrate.

- Drink boiled or bottled water to avoid contaminated water, if you are camping.

- Do not take risks with street vendor foods—locate supermarkets where you can buy fresh meals.

- Avoid or limit your use of fast food restaurants to the rare safe options.

- Be especially diligent in reapplying sunscreen throughout the day.

**TIP #4:** Bathroom Access Card

- Several U.S. states have laws on bathroom access for individuals with IBD

- Your child may carry a card to show to a business owner or employee that explains that they need access to a restroom.

- Patients can become a member of the Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation and will receive a membership card with “I Can’t Wait” language on the back to help you explain Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis to the outside world.

**TIP #5:** Insurance

- Please check with your child’ insurance company on the type of coverage that they have for travel; there may be a greater deductible and co-pay. You may want to consider travel insurance to cover for emergencies.
TIP # 6: Food Safety

- Always be watchful and pay attention to what your child eats.
- Be extra careful when your child is drinking water, and always use bottled water (even for brushing teeth) where the drinking water is not considered safe. Be careful that your child does not drink water by accident when she/he is taking a bath or shower.
- Avoid sushi, raw vegetables (including salads), ice cream and ice lollies. Remember to ask for drinks without ice, unless the ice is prepared using bottled water.

Resources:

- Crohn's & Colitis Foundation IBD Help Center
- Crohn's & Colitis Foundation Travel Resources
- CDC Travelers' Health
- International Association for Medication Assistance to Travelers
- Transportation Security Administration ostomy information
- United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc.
- United States Department of State