

Travelling

Travelling with myeloma

Going on holiday is often one of the highlights of the year – offering a welcome break from routine and a change of scenery. This does not necessarily need to change after a diagnosis of myeloma; with careful planning and a few sensible precautions, you can still enjoy holidays both in the UK and abroad.

This Infosheet outlines a few things which will, we hope, make your trip safer and more enjoyable.

Before you go

Letters and medications

It is always advisable to chat over your holiday plans with your doctor, especially if you are on treatment for your myeloma. Most doctors will be happy to write a letter for you to carry with you, outlining your previous / current treatment and details about your myeloma. This could be invaluable should you fall ill whilst you are away.

It is very important that you have enough medications with you to last for your whole trip. It may be sensible also to carry some extra in case of any unforeseen delays. If you are prone to picking up infections, it may be worth speaking to your doctor about taking a course of emergency antibiotics with you. As an added precaution you may also want to take some anti-diarrhoea medication with you.

When travelling, the Home Office advise that all prescription drugs should be carried:

- in their original packaging
- in your hand luggage
- with a copy of your (repeat) prescription, or a note from your doctor detailing any medications that you are taking with you

In addition, if you are travelling abroad for one month or more and you are taking large amounts of controlled drugs with you (e.g. opiate pain killers), then you may need an export licence from the Home Office. Your GP or consultant haematologist will need to apply for this export licence on your behalf.

You may also need to check with the Embassy or High Commission of the country you are visiting, or with Home Office Drugs Branch, in case they have any restrictions on taking your medications (e.g. opiate pain killers) into the country.

If you know that you will need to have treatment (e.g. infusions or injections) whilst you are travelling to a country within the European Union (or Switzerland) then you will also need to take the E112 form with you.

You should discuss this with your GP or consultant haematologist who will have to apply for funding for this treatment and then apply to the Department of Health for the E112 form.

If you are carrying syringes check with the airline first for their security guidelines – you may need an accompanying doctor's letter.

Vaccinations

Depending on which country you are planning to visit you may need to have vaccinations before you go. As most people with myeloma have a weakened immune system, there will be restrictions on which vaccinations are safe for you to receive. Again it is worth discussing this with your doctor or specialist haematology nurse well in advance of your proposed departure date.

Vaccines that are safe to receive include diphtheria, hepatitis A and B, inactivated polio injection, rabies, tetanus and typhoid injection.

Live vaccines that you should not receive include oral polio, oral typhoid, yellow fever and rubella.

Travel insurance

It is extremely important that you and your family / friends get travel insurance for your trip away. There are several specialist companies who provide tailored insurance for people with existing medical conditions such as myeloma.

If you are travelling to a country within the European Union (or Switzerland) you can now apply for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). The EHIC enables you to get free or reduced cost emergency treatment within the European Union. It entitles you to the same care as people living in another EU country, which could differ from that available on the NHS. EHIC has replaced the old E111 form and can be obtained from your local post office or by telephoning 0845 606 2030.

For more information, please see Myeloma UK's Infosheet *Travel Insurance*. To order your free copy, contact the **Myeloma Infoline** on **0800 980 3332**. This information is also available on our website at **www.myeloma.org.uk**

Travel arrangements

When planning your trip it is important to make sure that your travel plans are realistic and that you will not arrive at your destination exhausted or in extreme pain. It is advisable to think about any assistance that you may need whilst travelling. Most travel and airline companies will have a medical officer who should be contacted before your journey. He or she can then help with any special arrangements that you may need to make your trip more comfortable.

Travelling

Long haul flights

Before you go on a long haul flight, you may want to discuss preventative measures to help reduce the risk of DVT (deep vein thrombosis or blood clot) with your GP. During the flight it is important to try to exercise your feet / legs as this will help prevent stiffness and can reduce your risk of DVT.

All flights

It is important that you keep well hydrated throughout your flight. You may find it handy to have your own supply of bottled water which you can carry in your hand luggage. It may also be worthwhile taking a small travel cushion or neck collar with you for extra comfort, particularly if your journey is quite long.

Ask to sit near the toilet or for a seat with extra leg room if you think this may help. It is often helpful to get up and move around, at regular intervals throughout the flight, to minimise pain and discomfort.

While you are away

Food and drink

When away it is important to keep drinking lots of clear, non-alcoholic fluids – at least three litres a day. This will help protect your kidneys and prevent dehydration. Remember that if you are in a hot climate you may need to drink even more. It is sensible to drink bottled water when away from home to minimise the risk of infection.

Many people can develop stomach upsets whilst abroad so it is wise to adopt some sensible safety precautions when eating out. Try to eat only in restaurants that serve freshly cooked foods and avoid salads, ice in drinks and any uncooked meat or fish.

Sun safety

You will need to be particularly careful in the sun, especially if you are on, or have just completed, chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment, as your skin will be much more sensitive to the sun's rays. It is important to apply sun block liberally and regularly, especially to exposed areas. Staying in the shade, wearing a hat and loose cotton clothing can all help minimise the risk of burning.

Activities

Swimming in the sea or a pool is a great way to exercise and can be very relaxing. It is best to avoid alcohol before swimming and you should wait one hour after eating. However, avoid swimming if you have a HICKMAN® line in place.

The main thing for you to concentrate on, when you are away, is enjoying your well deserved break. So remember to pace yourself throughout the day – if you normally have a rest in the afternoon, for example, try to schedule this into your day.

Treatment away from home

If you do need to buy medicines abroad, be certain about what you are buying and do not take anything that you are unsure about. Do not bring any medications bought abroad home with you.

If you are taking erythropoietin (EPO), or any other medications that have to be stored below room temperature, remember to check that the hotel / apartment you are staying in has fridge facilities and that they will be happy for you to store your medications.

If you do become ill when you are away, make sure a doctor reads your letter detailing your medical history. Try to contact your insurance company as soon as possible – they should make all the necessary arrangements for you, and your family, to get home safely.

Within the UK

If you are on holiday in the UK you can phone NHS Direct in England and Wales or NHS 24 in Scotland for medical advice 24-hours a day.

You may also want to carry a 24-hour contact number for your hospital and / or doctor. Myeloma UK can give you the contact details of myeloma doctors within the UK and in some countries abroad.

If a nurse normally administers regular treatment to you, it is often possible to arrange for a local nurse to do this whilst you are away. It is also possible to arrange dialysis away from home in the UK and even abroad. Your medical team will be able to tell you more about this.

When you return

You will, we hope, return home rested and rejuvenated after an enjoyable time away. However, if you do start to feel unwell, particularly if you have persistent diarrhoea, an infection or a nasty insect bite, it is important that you see your GP immediately in order to receive the appropriate treatment. If necessary, try to make any insurance claims as soon as you return home, as you are more likely to remember events clearly.

Further information and useful organisations

Department of Health

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAdviceForTravellers

020 7210 4850 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)

Provides up-to-date health advice for travellers.

Eurodial Guide to Dialysis Centres

www.eurodial.org

00 33 4 7230 1230

Provides the most comprehensive guide to dialysis centres around the world.

Home Office Drugs Branch

www.drugs.gov.uk/drugs-laws/licensing/personal/

020 7035 0472 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)

Provides information about what the limits are for controlled drugs, export licences and embassy contact details.

Leukaemia CARE

www.leukaemiacare.org.uk

0800 169 6680 (24hrs)

Its helpline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by trained volunteers who offer befriending, support and information about leukaemia and other blood disorders, including myeloma. Leukaemia CARE also offers discretionary financial assistance and caravan holidays in the UK.

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

0808 808 2020 (Monday-Friday, 9am-6pm)

Its helpline is staffed by specialist advisors who provide information, practical and emotional support to those affected by cancer. May be able to offer patient grants towards a holiday.

NHS Direct / NHS24

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47

In Scotland call NHS24 on 08454 24 24 24

Staffed by trained medical professionals, it provides 24-hour access to information about all aspects of health and healthcare.

About this Infosheet

The information in this Infosheet is not meant to replace the advice of your medical team. They are the people to ask if you have questions about your individual situation. All Myeloma UK's publications are extensively reviewed by patients and healthcare professionals prior to publication.

Other information available from Myeloma UK

Myeloma UK has a range of Essential Guides, Infoguides and Infosheets available covering many areas of myeloma, its treatment and management. To order your free copies, contact the **Myeloma Infoline** on **0800 980 3332**. This information is also available 24/7 on our website at www.myeloma.org.uk

If you would like to talk to someone about any aspect of myeloma, its treatment and management, call the **Myeloma Infoline** on **0800 980 3332**. Your call will be answered by Myeloma Nurse Specialists who are supported by medical and scientific advisors. The Myeloma Infoline is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and is free to phone from anywhere in the UK. From outside the UK, call +44 131 557 3332 (charged at normal rate).

Authors: Ellen Watters RGN, Mandy Calder RGN, Myeloma UK
Issue date: August 2008