TRAVEL AND HAEMODIALYSIS

Planning, Tips and Stories
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Introduction

Holidays or travel for any reason are often an important aspect of our lifestyles. For many people travelling to a new place creates many happy family memories and offers new experiences. However for those on dialysis travelling may seem more daunting. It does need some additional planning and considerations but it is still possible to make sure that the trip is a positive experience.

This document is designed to guide planning for those on haemodialysis who wish to travel either within Australia or even overseas. Accessing centre based haemodialysis does requires some advance booking and staying healthy with kidney disease when travelling requires some simple considerations prior to and during travel.

Travelling on dialysis involves some simple steps that will be explained in more detail:

- Consider if you are healthy enough to undertake the travel
- **Find a dialysis unit** close to your desired travel location
- Check if the unit has a vacancy and associated costs
- **Budget** if there are dialysis costs
- Talk to your current dialysis unit team to organise special blood tests
- **Organise paperwork** to take with you
- Obtain a **supply of medications**
- Consider **travel insurance** (for overseas travel)
Step 1: Finding a dialysis unit

Booking in advance:
One of the first steps in planning your trip is finding a dialysis centre close to your chosen location. It is important to plan well in advance when wanting to travel while on haemodialysis. Ensure you book in advance, a minimum of 1 month is essential and 3 months is recommended, and more for peak holiday periods. Places are often limited in public units and more widely available in private units.

Travel dialysis Konnections programme. In some cases a “swap” can be organized where you ‘swap’ places with another patient who wishes to travel to where you live and vice versa. You take each others’ places in the dialysis centre. For more information on the Dialysis Chair Swap program, please refer to the dialysis unit guide page of the website: [www.kidney.org.au](http://www.kidney.org.au)

Dialysis Unit Guide –Australia:
Visit the [Dialysis Unit Guide (DUG)](http://www.kidney.org.au) on the Kidney Health Australia (KHA) Website to find a list of hospitals and dialysis centres within Australia that may offer dialysis placements while you are travelling. You will need to call the units and enquire about the availability of holiday dialysis spaces. Most units limit visits to a maximum of two weeks.

Overseas Units:
There are also countries that offer holiday dialysis placements if you wish to travel overseas. Costs will vary depending on the country and any reciprocal arrangements for healthcare. It is important to check the quality of the unit but those listed on the KHA websites or run by major companies are usually licensed to the same standards of those in Australia.
Step 2: Budget and Determine Costs

For Australians with Medicare cover, dialysis is generally provided free within Australia and New Zealand, including when away from home. Public dialysis centres within Australia should not have an additional charge for Australian residents to dialyse while on holiday.

Private dialysis is also an option within Australia and this may be more widely available. However there is a cost for the treatment which can be anywhere from $450 to $650 per treatment in South Australia and between $800 and $900 per treatment in the Eastern States. When you book, make sure you receive a written quote and confirmation of treatment dates. Overseas dialysis is often cheaper than in Australia but costs may vary considerably.

Some health insurance companies will also cover the cost of haemodialysis when you are travelling in Australia or overseas. Ask your insurance company if they offer this health benefit and what any co-payments may be.

**Whether it is a public unit or paid private unit, always check first if the unit can fit you in for dialysis.**

When travelling internationally you can get help with the cost of essential medical treatment in some countries under the Australian Government’s Reciprocal Health Care Agreements (RHCA). Not all treatment is covered under an RHCA. Refer to the International travel on dialysis and post transplant section on the KHA website for more information. The RHCA website also has a list of countries the Australian government has reciprocal healthcare agreements with.

**EnableNSW**: For residents of New South Wales there is a special scheme to allow access for up to three sessions per year at one of 22 participating private units in Australia and NZ with all costs covered. Other States are considering similar schemes so check with your unit if a similar scheme exists that you can access. [www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.enable.health.nsw.gov.au/)
Step 3: Manage Medical Information

Blood tests
Most units will request copies of recent blood tests including screening for infectious blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis B. Plan to have these done at least two weeks in advance to allow time to have the tests and receive the results.

Dialysis records
The dialysis unit you visit will also need a copy of your recent dialysis history including the usual prescription for your dialysis. Your dialysis nurse will be able to organise copies of this information for you but it will usually be your responsibility to send it or take it to the dialysis unit that you are visiting. Please give your own dialysis unit at least a week to organise the paperwork.

General medical information
Keep an up to date treatment letter including your medical history from your doctor with you at all times and if travelling by plane have a copy in your hand-luggage. The letter should summarise your medical condition, results of recent blood tests, and list any medications you take. When travelling overseas you will need to provide this letter to customs. It is also useful for you if you need to consult your doctor whilst away from home. It is recommended that you keep an additional scanned electronic copy for emergencies. Your hospital can provide a copy upon request but this is not ideal if you need urgent treatment or medication.

Personal Electronic Health Record
If you have a personal electronic health record you will be able to permit health professionals to access the information in this record when you are travelling. To set up a personal medical record visit www.ehealth.gov.au
Step 4: Plan Medications

Medication supply

When travelling within Australia you can obtain medications at any pharmacy. Ensure that you have a prescription that is valid for the period of travel. Even if you have your medication supply, consider taking a prescription in case you lose your medications.

Advice for travellers bringing medications into Australia is government information that details overseas travel and medications. Essential medications can only be carried to cover a maximum of 3 months (maximum dosage). Ensure your doctor writes an up-to-date treatment letter setting out your health conditions and medication. Refer to the “Travel overseas with PBS medications” section on the KHA website.

Some countries, including Australia, require a special license for certain drugs. Pain killers, opiates and erythropoietin are examples of drugs that may be considered illegal in some countries. Ensure you check drugs that are considered illegal in countries you may travel to. Ensure that you have a list of current medications signed by your doctor. This will prevent the risk of fines, or lengthy delays in customs. Check here for a list of drugs that are prohibited and have therapeutic use exemptions (Google: ‘Prohibited List of Substances from the World Anti-Doping Agency’).
Carrying injectable/specially listed medications
When you are carrying syringes you must also have the injectable drug such as insulin packed with it. There is no limit to how many empty syringes you can take as long as you also have the drug with you, with a professionally printed label that clearly identifies it. On your return trip make sure you declare any drugs you were given or prescribed. A treatment letter may be requested by Customs when returning home.

Medications requiring refrigeration
Most hotels usually have a fridge in every room but you will need to check prior to travel if your hotel has a fridge. Those hotels that do not have a fridge available in the room maybe be able to suggest alternate options. If you have a medication which must be kept cool whilst travelling ask your pharmacist how to pack it for travel. A popular option is to pack medications in a thermo-bag with re-usable freezer packs. A wide-necked thermos chilled in advance also works. Make sure you allow time for transfers and delays when calculating the length of a trip when medication may be unrefrigerated.

Preparing for travel delays
Travel with at least a 3 day reserve of supplies in luggage that is with you at all times in case of unexpected travel delays – weather, flight delays, unexpected scheduling or shipment delays. If a suitcase goes astray it should arrive on a later flight but always pack 24 hours of your essential medications in a carry-on bag.

Vaccines: for travel overseas
Check with your GP if vaccines are required in the countries where you wish to travel. You must then check with your kidney specialist if it is safe for you to have these vaccines. Transplant patients need to be especially careful of vaccines.
Step 5: Plan for Dietary and other related needs

**Ordering special diets**
When you travel by plane or train, make arrangements for special meals (e.g. low-salt, low-fat, diabetic). Many menus will indicate meals that meet certain criteria but it may be worth chatting to a dietitian about the foods to avoid when you are not in control of your own cooking whilst away.

**Diabetes**
If you are diabetic you may find that you are not able to eat within your usual schedule so carrying glucose tablets or jelly beans and snacks such as biscuits should be available to treat a low blood sugar and can avoid an episode of low blood sugar. Travel with other food or a nutrition supplement in case of delays.

If you require monitoring and/or insulin for your diabetes ensure you carry syringes and blood glucose monitoring unit equipment where it is easily accessible.

Step 6: Preparing for adverse conditions

**First Aid**
First aid needs as a dialysis patient are similar to anyone. It is always recommended that you are prepared for simple emergencies. Pack a supply of band-aids, bandages, pain killers, insect-bite ointment and anti-diarrhoea pills. St John Ambulance has some very simple but comprehensive first aid kits. Ask your health team for names of over-the-counter drugs you may use.

**Accessing local medical facilities**
It is useful to know where your closest medical facility is that can provide 24 hour support. Smart-phones, the internet or hotel services are all excellent ways to locate the nearest facility. Remember to visit a doctor or hospital if you become unwell and simple medications do not provide a quick cure.
Be sun-smart
Slip-slop-slap if you are likely to be exposed to the sun. Avoid over-exposure to the sun, wear a hat and take a high-factor sunscreen. Sun protection is particularly important if you are taking medications that suppress your immune system.

Step 7: Travel Insurance

If you are travelling overseas it is strongly recommended you consider taking out an overseas travel insurance policy. When you have any chronic disease, travel insurance may be limited for a pre-existing condition, and/or they may charge additional premium to cover it.

As a guide: Travel insurance may be granted if you have kidney disease or have had a transplant over six months old; there must never have been a rejection or infection and your overall health must be stable. Travel insurance will not usually cover anyone on a transplant waiting list or with a complex health history.

Insurance may still offer you coverage for other unexpected incidents that are not connected to your chronic disease (i.e. lost luggage, emergency dental, travel delay, accident etc). Every travel insurance policy is different so check carefully which policy will best suit your needs.

Some credit cards will offer you a level of insurance if you pay for all of your travel on them. Although again there may be limited cover and you need to ascertain what level of coverage they offer for pre-existing medical conditions. You can consider basic travel insurance via your travel agent, a union, the post office, bank or even your private health fund. Ask questions about any cover you consider, especially if you have one or multiple pre-existing health conditions. Agencies display policies on websites but these can be difficult to understand so you may like to consider speaking to a customer service advisor.

If you choose to travel without travel insurance for your health, be aware that there may be considerable costs for medical treatments overseas.
Specialist Holidays

Dialysis Escape Line
Dialysis Escape Line Australia is a not for profit organization that strives to support dialysis patients and make their lives “a little more normal”. They hold two annual events. One is held at a location within Australia and one is held on a cruise ship. They set up temporary dialysis units, where they are not normally found. This is becoming more and more popular, however spaces are limited. Visit [www.dialysisescapeline.com](http://www.dialysisescapeline.com) to find out more information about Dialysis Escape Line Australia and how to become a member. Another dialysis cruise company is Dialysis at Sea: [www.dialysisatsea.com](http://www.dialysisatsea.com)

Kids Holiday Programmes
Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) also affects kids. Kidney Health Australia runs ‘Kidney Kids Camps’ every April. Kidney Kids Camps are a 4 day recreational camp where children with CKD stage 3 or greater and their siblings can attend.

Visit the [KHA website](http://www.kidney.org.au) kids section for more information on Kidney Kids Camps and how to apply.
Big Red Kidney Holiday Bus

A world-first initiative, the Big Red Kidney Bus will provide mobile holiday dialysis, travelling to popular holiday spots initially through Victoria where it will set-up for several weeks, staffed by Monash Health renal nurses and technicians. The concept for the Big Red Kidney Bus came from the late Mr Vince Tripodi, a dialysis patient at Latrobe Valley Regional Health Dialysis Unit, who wrote to Ms Wilson about his idea for a mobile dialysis unit in 2011. The bus will travel to popular destinations such as Mallacoota, the Grampians and Mildura. The first destination will be Lakes Entrance in October 2014. For more information on the Big Red Kidney Bus you can visit the KHA website via www.bigredkidneybus.org.au

Contact Details for General information and Advice
If you would like further information about any of the information in this booklet please visit

- Kidney Health Australia website: www.kidney.org.au
- Phone the Kidney Health Information Service on 1800 454 363

If you are on home dialysis you can also find information about ‘Dialysis on the Road’ at www.homedialysis.org.au

The information provided in this brochure was updated on May 2014. KHA cannot accept any responsibility if information has changed. Travel plans should always be supported by your local dialysis unit.

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Kidney Health Information Service: 1800 454 363    www.kidney.org.au
Travel Success stories
These are some stories from haemodialysis patients who have visited many amazing places.

Arnold – Borneo

In November 2013, I travelled to Borneo with my wife, Ida. We have friends in Borneo and some family friends of ours who are also on dialysis have been there. They dialysed at the Private Hospital Norma Clinic. I decided to go there and it was fantastic! The unit was lovely and all the equipment was similar to home. The service was fantastic and very well priced as I did not have travel insurance. Very relaxing and enjoyable holiday - I loved the food and company of friends! I can’t wait to go back again.

Jenny – Japan

My husband and I went for a 12 day tour to Japan with ‘Dialysis Abroad’. There were 17 people in our group and our tour guide has had a kidney transplant herself. Only three of us were haemodialysis patients and we all dialysed at three different centres. We travelled all around Japan and got to see all of the amazing sights including Mount Fuji and the Hiroshima Peace Park. All of the centres we dialysed at were very clean and professionally run. I was very apprehensive before we left however the trip was very well organized. We had a wonderful holiday.
Jenny – Bali

I was recently invited to travel to Nusa Dua, Bali to ‘road test’ the new dialysis centre there. Nusa Dua is the lovely resort side of Bali and the dialysis centre is a part of the new BIMC hospital. It is owned and run by Australians. I spent a week in Bali, dialysing three times. The BIMC hospital dialysis centre had the best facilities I have come across in dialysis centres both in Australia and overseas. Each patient had their own TV, DVD and computer with access to the internet. The cheery and motivated staff were more than happy to pamper me and they can even organize someone to come in to give you a pedicure or a manicure while you dialyse. Overall it was a great experience and I highly recommend it.

Veriam – Malaysia

I am 70 years old and I go to Malaysia every year for 2 – 3 months. I make arrangements with the dialysis centre there before I go. The centre I go to there is very satisfactory. There are nurses and a visiting doctor who will see the patients on a daily basis. There is also a visiting Nephrologist who sees the patients every month. It’s not too expensive – about $50-$70 a day for a 4.5 hour dialysis session and EPO and iron injections. They refer to the hospital if there are any complications with patients. I enjoy going to Malaysia because of the moderate climate, cheap and delicious food, and the cost of living is very moderate.