

Travelling

This Infosheet outlines some practical guidance on travelling with myeloma which we hope will make your trip as a myeloma patient as safe and as enjoyable as possible. This includes what to do before you go on holiday, what to do while you are away and when you return.

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 myeloma diagnosis; with careful planning and a few sensible precautions, you can still enjoy holidays both in the UK and abroad.

Before you go

Letters and medications

It is always advisable to chat through your holiday plans with your doctor, especially if you are receiving treatment for your myeloma. Check that they are happy for you to travel before you make arrangements. If you are currently receiving treatment, it may be necessary to wait until you've finished treatment before you travel.

Most doctors will be happy to write a letter for you to carry with you, outlining your previous and current treatment(s) 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 drugs with you to last for your whole trip and it is sensible to carry extra in case of any unforeseen delays.

Speak to your doctor about taking a course of emergency antibiotics with you, so if you pick up an infection you can treat it. As an added precaution you may also want to take some 'just in case' drugs with you – for example to deal with the onset or increase of diarrhoea, constipation or pain.

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

Restrictions

If you are travelling abroad and taking any controlled drugs with you (e.g. opiate pain-killers), you

will need a letter of ownership to prove you own the drugs. If you are travelling for three months or more, or you have enough drugs to last you three months or more, you will need to apply for an export licence from the Home Office. You may also need to check with the Embassy or High Commission of the country you are visiting, or with the Home Office, in case they have any restrictions on taking your medications (e.g. opiate pain-killers) into the country.

Check the security guidelines of any airlines you are travelling with, particularly if you are carrying syringes, as you may need an accompanying doctor's letter.

Treatment abroad

If you know that you will need to have treatment (e.g. infusions or injections) whilst you are away in a country within the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland then you will need to apply for an S2 form. The S2 form entitles you to state-funded treatment in these countries. Treatment will be provided under the same conditions of care and payment as for residents of that country. This could mean you have to pay a percentage of the costs personally.

Alternatively, you can apply for

funding for treatment in the EEA via the EU Directive route. If you choose to do this however, you will usually need to pay for treatment up front and claim the cost back once you are in the UK. You may also need to apply for permission to have certain treatments in advance. The treatment can be given in the country's state or private sector, but you will only be reimbursed up to as much as the treatment would have cost on the NHS.

You should speak to your GP or consultant haematologist about how to apply for funding for your treatment abroad.

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 important to discuss this with your doctor or nurse well in advance of your proposed travel dates.

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

Getting travel insurance can be more difficult when you have myeloma, so it's a good idea to start looking as soon as you can. Insurance for travel to some countries, particularly the US and Canada, can often be difficult to obtain and very expensive. You may therefore want to look into obtaining insurance before booking your holiday.

Some countries in Europe have reciprocal health arrangements with the UK. This means you will get the same care as the people who live in the country you're visiting, which may not be the same as the care you'd expect to get from the NHS. To access this you need a **free** European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) from the NHS, which you can apply for online at www.nhs.uk/ehic or by phoning 0300 330 1350. An EHIC entitles UK residents to access state-provided healthcare in EEA countries and Switzerland on the same basis as a resident of that country, either at a reduced cost, or sometimes for free. Each country's health system is different, and might not include all the things you would expect

to get free of charge on the NHS. This means you may have to make a contribution to the cost of your care and not every treatment will be available, so the EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance. It will not, for example, cover any private medical costs nor help with getting back to the UK should you become unwell while on holiday. There are several specialist companies who provide tailored insurance for people with existing medical conditions such as myeloma.

For more information see the [Travel Insurance Infosheet from Myeloma UK](#).

Travel arrangements

When planning your trip, it is important to make sure that your travel plans are realistic and that you're not going to be overdoing it on holiday. You might want to think about how you can factor in plenty of rest during your travel.

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. They 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 clots) with your GP, particularly because myeloma patients are at an increased risk of developing venous thromboembolic events (VTEs).

During the flight it is important to try to exercise by regularly moving your feet/legs as this will help prevent stiffness and can reduce your risk of DVT. Your doctor may give you prophylactic drugs, such as aspirin or warfarin, or suggest you wear compression stockings (flight socks) to reduce your risk of DVT. It is important to speak to your doctor before you take prophylactic drugs or wear compression stockings.

For more information see the [Venous Thromboembolic Events \(VTEs\) Infosheet from Myeloma UK](#).

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 rather than relying on the catering on the flight. However,

you should remember that there are restrictions placed on what liquids you can take through the security checks at airports – bottled water can usually be purchased in the shops in the departure lounge after you have passed through security. 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 well hydrated. This will help protect your kidneys and prevent dehydration. Remember that if you are in a hot climate you may need to drink more than you usually would. It is sensible to drink bottled water when away from home to minimise the risk of infection. Alcohol should be limited as it will cause dehydration and drowsiness.

Try to maintain a well-balanced diet and eat regularly while you are away. It is not uncommon to

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 foods such as:

- Salads
- Ice in drinks
- Uncooked meat or fish
- Unsealed condiments like mayonnaise
- Street food that you don't know has been freshly prepared or has been sitting in the sun for a while

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 an adequate sun block liberally and regularly, especially to exposed areas. You can find more information on choosing a sun block (for example, what is meant by broad spectrum, SPF, star rating) on the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk/livewell/skin. Staying in the shade, wearing a hat and covering up with loose cotton clothing can all help minimise the risk of burning.

Activities

It is important that you enjoy your holiday, however, you should be sensible about any physical activities during your holiday, for example physical activities such as skiing or hiking for large parts of your holiday should be carefully considered. It is also advisable to avoid extreme sports and activities while on holidays, especially if you have myeloma bone disease.

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 remember that taking exercise on a full stomach can be uncomfortable. Don't forget to reapply your sun block after swimming. You should 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 drugs abroad, be certain about what

you are buying and do not take anything 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 a refrigerator 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. You should contact your insurance company as soon as possible – they should make all the necessary arrangements for you, and your travel companions, to get home safely.

Within the UK

If you are on holiday in the UK, take the phone numbers of both your doctor and nurse and the out-of-hours doctor at your hospital so that you can call them if you need any medical advice.

If a nurse normally administers regular treatment to you, it is often possible to arrange in advance for a local nurse to do this whilst you are away. It is also possible to arrange in advance to have dialysis away from home

in the UK and even abroad. Your doctor or nurse will be able to tell you more about this.

When you return

You will hopefully 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.

Going on holiday or travelling as a myeloma patient can still be enjoyable and relaxing and you should not try to avoid it. If you feel anxious about travelling, try planning trips closer to home to start with or plan trips that only require travelling by train rather than aeroplane.

Further information and useful organisations

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

Provides up-to-date health advice for travellers, including on the S2 and EHIC forms.

Global Dialysis

www.globaldialysis.com

Provides comprehensive information on dialysis centres around the world.

Home Office Drug and Firearms Licensing Unit

www.gov.uk/controlled-drugs-licences-fees-and-returns

020 7035 6330

(Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm)

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 publications are extensively reviewed by patients and healthcare professionals prior to publication. For a list of references used to develop our resources, visit **www.myeloma.org.uk/references**

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 or to talk to one of our Myeloma Information Specialists about any aspect of myeloma, call the **Myeloma Infoline: 0800 980 3332** or **1800 937 773** from Ireland.

The Myeloma Infoline is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm and is free to phone from anywhere in the UK and Ireland.

Information and support about myeloma is also available around the clock at www.myeloma.org.uk

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Myeloma UK 22 Logie Mill, Beaverbank Business Park, Edinburgh EH7 4HG
T: 0131 557 3332 **E: myelomauk@myeloma.org.uk** Charity No: SC 026116

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1800 937 773 from Ireland
www.myeloma.org.uk

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