Tips for Travelling with HPN

"Parenteral Nutrition-Down Under" (PN-DU)

Our aim is to support, research and inform consumers, carers and providers of parenteral nutrition (PN) for intestinal failure in Australia and New Zealand
Tips for Travelling with HPN

A little preparation can go a long way when you’re travelling far from home with HPN. Keeping this in mind, we’ve adapted the tips compiled by the Oley Foundation in USA to make your next trip safer and more enjoyable.

Please also refer to our Tips & Hints booklet for more little travel tips.

Thank you Oley and to everyone who has contributed to these tips and to those who volunteer to share their travelling experience.

1. Consult Your Doctor

Ask your doctor/medical team whether travel is appropriate and what problems might be anticipated. Find out whether your doctor or an associate will be available by phone during your trip. (If possible get their pager number, since the emergency may happen after hours.) In the event of a problem, you and the attending staff at the unfamiliar hospital will want to be able to reach a doctor who is familiar with you and your medical history.

The doctor’s phone number, your medical history and other vital information should be filled in your “Travel/Hospitalisation Packet” and carried with you. A copy of the packet can be downloaded from Oley (http://www.oley.org/travelpack.html). You can also email us at contactpndu@gmail.com for an electronic copy of the packet that you can customise to fit your needs; or call us at 0413 715 187 (Australia) and we’ll mail you a copy.

Ask your doctor to write a letter explaining your need for the ‘supplies’ you are bringing with you — especially if you are travelling out of the country and/or with pain medications. (Note: for the purpose of this booklet, ‘supplies’ refers to everything you need for HPN, from tubing and syringes, to HPN solution, to medications and vitamins.) Pack a copy of the letter in each box of supplies, and carry one on your person to share with customs and other travel officials. If possible have a copy of the letter written in the language of the country you are travelling to. For free foreign language translation help try: http://babelfish.com or www.freetranslation.com.

2. Take out Travel Insurance

Some insurance companies are more agreeable to covering TPN as a pre-existing medical condition than others and won’t cost a fortune. Ask around and make sure you read the fine print. Some insurance companies which have been helpful in covering other chronic illnesses are:

In Australia:
- Columbus Direct Ph 1300 669 999
- Sureplan Ph 1300 787 376
- Covermore Ph 1800 251 881
- QBE Mercantile Ph 1300 555 017

In New Zealand:
- Columbus Direct Ph 0800 55 99 11
- Travel Sure Ph 0800 500 225
- State Insurance Ph 0800 802 424

3. Prepare for Emergencies

Have a plan of action in case of an emergency. Locate the nearest medical centre or community hospital in the area you are travelling to. Ask your doctor if he or she knows a doctor familiar with HPN in the area you will be staying.

The phone number of a local pharmacy is also helpful to find out ahead of time, in case you need a prescription phoned in.

Discuss with your doctor/medical team what steps to take should you become ill or experience difficulties with your HPN. For your convenience and peace of mind, Oley has a complication chart for HPN consumers, which covers the symptoms and steps to take for common problems related to HPN. It is a good tool to use when speaking with your doctor/medical team prior to leaving, and to pack with you for the trip. (Copies of the charts are available by emailing us at contactpndu@gmail.com.)

4. Research Your Supply Needs

Prepare a list of supplies well ahead of time (sample spreadsheet inventories can be emailed to you for your use, just email us at contactpndu@gmail.com). This will help you avoid overlooking any items. Pack a few extras in case of loss or damage. Talk to your doctor/medical team and/or home care company about a back up plan (extra pump or battery, or how to gravity feed), in case you have trouble with your pump when you are on the road.

If you are travelling abroad, you will likely need to plan ahead how you will overcome the issue of running your pump on an electrical system that is different from your home country’s. The simplest and most reliable option is to run your pump on regular 9V batteries, if your pump allows (check with your Home Care Company). Regular alkaline batteries typically last for two or three infusions, where lithium batteries may get you through five infusions. While you are still at home, run your infusion with 9V batteries for a few days to test how long they last for your pump, and pack accordingly. You can also buy 9V batteries in most countries, though for the small amount of weight and space, you may as well bring them from home.
Another idea is to purchase an adapter made expressly for your pump/battery charger, if the company offers one for the country/region you are travelling to. For example, one consumer was able to purchase a ‘European CADD adapter’ for his CADD pump/battery recharger through his supplier which he was able to plug directly into different European outlets (without using a generic travel converter, transformer or plug adapter). This same consumer cautions against using a generic travel adapter/converter/transformer (that you might use for a hairdryer) with your pump/battery charger, since he ‘fried’ his battery charger when using one on a previous trip abroad.

A third option for getting around this issue is to infuse by gravity, which you would need to discuss with your doctor/medical team before implementing and will not work with non-gravity giving sets.

5. Work with Your Home Care Company

Your home care company may have an office or affiliate in the area you are travelling to that can deliver solutions/formula, and possibly supplies, directly to you at your destination. There may be a cost involved and this will need to be discussed. This option avoids the fatigue of carrying the supplies yourself, and reduces the worry about shipping delays and the hassle of dealing with customs officials (when travelling abroad). Just in case of a delay, it is advisable to pack at least one night’s worth of supplies with you.

A second option is to have your home care provider ship your supplies for you. If your supplies will be shipped to a hotel, you’ll need to explain to a hotel representative (likely the manager of the receiving or security department) how to handle the supplies properly, especially if any of it requires refrigeration. It is best to do this when you make your reservation to ensure they can accommodate you, and then to verify the information a SECOND TIME the day you expect the supplies to arrive. Again, because of the possibility of delay, it is advisable to pack at least one night’s worth of supplies with you.

To be sure your supplies are there when you need them, you may want to have them shipped such that they arrive a day ahead of you. This way you can verify before you leave home that they have arrived safely. (This may be helpful when going on a cruise.) Unfortunately, some companies will not ship supplies ahead for fear of mishandling or loss.

Having your supplies shipped overseas can be a more risky and time consuming adventure. If you decide to go this route, one experienced traveller suggests having them shipped ‘directly’ to you via air cargo. (He cautions against using an international courier such as Fed Ex or UPS, because no-one knowledgeable about the supplies will be there to answer questions if difficulties arise with customs officials.) He advises carrying two days’ worth of supplies with you (at least one day’s worth in the cabin), choosing a direct flight whenever possible, and having the rest of the supplies arrive a day after you. This gives you time to orient yourself in the foreign city, and to be at the air cargo terminal when your supplies arrive so you can personally assure their safe and timely passage through customs.

No matter how you choose to ship your supplies, planning ahead and coordinating your efforts with your home care company can make this process a lot smoother and is well worth the extra effort. Before you leave, both you and the home care company should know details like how many boxes are being shipped, their contents (clearly labeled) and your travel itinerary (including flight/transportation information, destination addresses and phone numbers).

One consumer whose luggage--including 8 days of TPN and hydration--was lost on a flight from the US to Europe, recommends carrying on all of your supplies when travelling anywhere you cannot be guaranteed overnight delivery by your home care company. This approach can be very fatiguing, of course, and requires extra work with the airlines to avoid a financial charge for the extra baggage.

Another option for sending your supplies or other baggage that can tire you is a door-to-door luggage shipping service. United Airlines offers this service in the US, as do a few other shipping/courier-type companies. You’ll want to research this option carefully to be sure you’ve covered your risks. you (the caregiver) pass through security before they search your child. Long lines and long walks to the gate can be a problem for children infusing – airlines do have wheelchairs available for use if your child is too old for a stroller.

Unfortunately at the time of print, there is no provision in Australia or New Zealand for the free transport of medical supplies if they exceed normal luggage allowances. Therefore the expense of excess luggage needs to be taken into account if you intend to take all your supplies with you.


We highly recommend you use your national airline, even if it costs a little more, in order to avoid unnecessary problems when arranging for your complex medical needs. Negotiating with your fellow countrymen can be difficult enough when you have special medical requirements, but trying to negotiate with an overseas airline (no matter how good an airline it is) with possible language and cultural barriers can create even more unnecessary stress and complications. We also do not recommend you use budget airlines if you are needing to transport large quantities of medical supplies or are needing to infuse in-flight due to the probability that they will not be able to accommodate your needs.
Like most airlines, Qantas and Air New Zealand have special requirements for passengers with particular medical conditions and/or requiring in-flight medication and special clearance will be needed. Again, preparation is necessary and planning your flights well in advance is key. Go to http://www.qantas.com.au/infodetail/flying/beforeYouTravel/mediform.pdf or http://www.airnewzealand.com.au/special-assistance-medical-condition to see if you will require medical clearance. If so, when booking your flights, let the airline know of the full situation – what medical supplies/equipment you will need in-flight and the reason for its use. The airline will require a letter from your doctor outlining your condition, what will be needed in flight, what you will be travelling with and that you are fit to travel.

Although an infusion pump is not listed as accepted in-cabin medical support equipment with Qantas, it does not mean it is not permitted. Special clearance will be required for the infusion pump to be used in-flight however as well as for the volume of TPN where it exceeds normal in-cabin liquid allowances. Again, this must be included in your doctor’s letter and discussed with the airline at the time of booking. Air New Zealand requires that “any equipment provided by the customer or outside agency will need an ‘aircraft-type approved’ certificate, or be checked and approved by Air New Zealand Engineering prior to use, to ensure that the equipment will not interfere with the safety and operation of the aircraft”. Approval for the use of Bodyguard 323 to be used in-flight with Air New Zealand has been gained by PN-DU in 2010. Please contact us for more information on what to discuss with the airline at the time of booking.

Airlines do not ordinarily allow electronic or battery operated devices to be running during take-off and landing, however approval has been gained from Air New Zealand for the running of the Bodyguard 323. Again, please contact us to find out more information and receive a copy of the approval to take with you. At the time of printing, we are hoping to also gain this permission from Qantas, so contact us to see if this has been received. If you are flying with an airline that doesn’t allow for the running of your pump during take-off and landing, you will need to discuss with your doctor/medical team what to do in this situation if you are planning to fly with your TPN running in-flight as these stoppages could amount to a considerable length of time. Flushing the line is a good option.

At this stage neither Qantas or Air New Zealand have special baggage allowances for medical supplies but do allow liquids and icebricks in checked-in luggage, so long as everything is clearly marked and carefully packed (they don’t take responsibility if something happens to it in-flight). Special handling clearance may be required, so again, speak with the airline at the time of booking if you intend to take all your supplies with you.

Air New Zealand has in 2010 granted permission for TPN in an esky/chilly bin with icebricks to be included in carry-on luggage, providing more surety that the TPN will be kept at the necessary 2-8ºC. There are weight (7kg) and size restrictions:
- International flights and domestic jets 115cm (56cm (width), 36cm (height) and 23cm (depth))
- Domestic link flights 105cm (48cm (width), 34cm (height) and 23cm (depth))

Once again, we are hoping to soon have the same permissions from Qantas, so contact us for more details. All of this will need to be discussed with the airline at the time of booking.

You will also need to check whether any of your luggage is prohibited on board airlines, whether in hand luggage or checked-in luggage (eg Chlorhexidine has been found to be not allowed) and discuss an alternative with your doctor/medical team.


7. Keep Solutions Cool

The new multi-chamber (3-compartment or 3-in-1 bags) do not require refrigeration before mixing the chambers, but if you mix ahead of time the resulting ‘All-in-One or AIO’ mixture must be stored in your fridge. Other HPN solutions almost always require refrigeration. This can be a nuisance, but there are some tried and true tips that experienced travellers follow. To reduce your load, pack items that require refrigeration separately, clearly labeling those that need to stay cold.

To be sure your solution/formula stays cool enough, use cooling packs on the bags and cover both with ice. Don’t forget to re-cool your cooling packs in a freezer whenever you have the opportunity–especially when travelling by car in hot weather. When making a hotel reservation, be sure they can guarantee a refrigerator in your room, or space in their kitchen’s refrigerator that you will have adequate access to. When your hotel doesn’t offer refrigeration, but does offer ice, try this method. Using plastic containers or Zip Lock bags make some ice blocks, then each morning, pour off any water that has melted and fill any empty space in the bag/container with ice cubes. These can last several days, depending on the weather. As the days pass, and your solution gets used, fill any empty space in the cooler with crumbled newspaper, and cover with a heavy bath towel.
8. Air Travel with a PN Dependent Child (much of this advice is also applicable for PN dependent adults)

Call the airline: Explain you need to carry large amounts of fluids/medication on the plane and ask will you need to get special permission, what you will need etc--make sure you have it!

Make use of disability services: With airlines taking extreme security precautions, there can be hold-ups. The disability lines can often be faster and with an infusing child you know they will likely set off alarm bells anyway. Once you get to the security checkpoint explain that your child has a medical device and bag/equipment attached to him/her which is likely to activate the alarm. It is also recommended that you ask the security officials to wait until you (the caregiver) pass through security before they search your child. Long lines and long walks to the gate can be a problem for children infusing--airlines do have wheelchairs available for use if your child is too old for a stroller.

At the Gate: Check with customer services at the gate if they have early boarding for special needs. It makes a big difference getting on the plane and getting equipment sorted before everyone else starts boarding. They can also arrange a wheelchair to be at the destination.

Be prepared to turn the pump off during take off and landing: One of our parents’ child has a single lumen broviac and for air travel they use a Y connector so that the line can easily be flushed when the pump needs to be turned off. (Please see more information on this issue in Section ‘6. Qantas and Air New Zealand’.)

If you don’t take it you will need it!
Sad but true: most kids (and adults) on PN don’t look sick so it is easy to be refused special services. While elsewhere you would be discreet with tubes and bags and external medical attachments, in the airport expose as much as you can--a wheelchair also helps.

9. Network with Other Travellers

Whether you are planning your first trip on HPN, or your first trip overseas, it’s a good idea to call a consumer who has experience travelling with HPN. The volunteers listed in the chart below have happily provided helpful tips and stories to PN-DU members. Feel free to call on them for advice concerning your next trip. Bon Voyage!

PN-DU Consumers and Carers with Significant Travel Experience

Brenda (Consumer): email: brendadun@gmail.com
Jodee (Carer): email: jodee1@zoominternet.net
Karen (Consumer): email: kjw2077@tpg.com.au Ph: (02) 9987 1978 (Aus)
Kate (Carer): email: mikenktchap@bigpond.com
Tina/Andy (Carers): email: tinagodbert@hotmail.com Ph: (06) 835 0064 (NZ)

PN-DU has made every reasonable effort to ensure that the content of this leaflet is accurate at the time of production, but accepts no responsibility for any errors or omissions. PN-DU strongly recommends that anyone using information from the leaflet in relation to his/her current feeding practice should verify this with his/her hospital/medical team.

This is not a complete list of travel tips and some other tips are included in our Hints & Tips booklet. We know many of you will have others to contribute. You can do this at any time by contacting PN-DU:

Email: contactpndu@gmail.com