

Living with bladder cancer



Travel

There is more information on bladder cancer and its treatment on our website at actionbladdercanceruk.org

For many people who have gone through a diagnosis of cancer, surgery and/or treatment, having a break and getting away from it all is something to look forward to and enjoy. There are some practicalities that you need to think about, though, when you're making your plans.

First, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. There are some circumstances where you may have to put off your travel or adjust your ideas.

If your plan involves flying, you may need to give this some thought, especially if you've had certain types of surgery or treatment. You may have to change or delay your plans until you become well enough to cope with the effects of air travel. Some hot or humid destinations may not be a good idea straight away, either. Ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice.

Travel insurance

It's always best to have travel insurance cover, in case you have medical issues while away from home. If you're abroad, medical treatment can be extremely expensive and the cost of being repatriated (returned home) is very high. You would need to pay for this yourself if you don't have the right insurance cover.

You may find it difficult to get travel insurance cover with some companies and you may have to pay more to cover your new medical condition. But it's very important that you tell the insurance company about your cancer when you apply. The insurance company will ask about your cancer, treatment and follow-up, so you may want to make sure you know all the details from your doctor or specialist nurse before you apply for insurance. Some companies may be reluctant to cover you until you have completed investigations and have a clear diagnosis. Some

may not cover cancers at all. You may need to shop around. The price of a policy will also depend on where you are going, and you might want to bear this in mind if you are planning a trip (Europe is relatively cheap and North America is expensive, for example).

You must make sure that the policy you buy says that it covers emergency medical problems related to your cancer while you're travelling.

You may however get a better insurance deal which covers your needs through a specialist insurer.

Cancer Research UK has a list of insurance companies that have been recommended by users of their website at www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/practically/travelling-with-cancer/travel-insurance/specialist-policies-and-insurance-companies.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

While the UK is still a member of the European Union (EU), having an EHIC means you can get healthcare free or at a reduced cost if you need it in the EU, Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland or Switzerland. It's unclear whether this will be the case if the UK leaves the EU (currently scheduled for 29 March 2019).

There's more information on the card at www.gov.uk/european-health-insurance-card.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations are needed for some destinations – check what you'll need at www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations. If you've had chemotherapy, radiation therapy or steroid therapy, you may not be able to have some types of vaccine: ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice.

Paperwork

It's a very good idea to keep a written summary of your illness and treatment with you at all times when you're travelling, especially if you're leaving the UK. If you can, translate it into the language of the country you're visiting. The summary should include information on your:

- diagnosis
- recent and ongoing treatment
- medication
- contact details (including family members, GP, oncology team and/or other health professionals).

If you don't take this, at least keep the names and contact details of family members or other important people with your passport.

If you are travelling with medication, keep a copy of your prescription with it at all times (a copy with each set if packed in different places). A letter from your doctor explaining the need for medication and equipment is also helpful and is sometimes a requirement (ask for this at least 3 weeks before you travel, to give your doctor time to write it). If you have any controlled medications, you will need to carry a licence (see www.gov.uk/guidance/controlled-drugs-licences-fees-and-returns#applying-for-a-licence-travellers).

Travelling with medication

If you need to take a prescription medication while you're travelling outside the UK, talk to your doctor or nurse specialist at least 2 months before you travel. They can advise you whether you will need to make any special arrangements.

You'll also need to check the regulations about medication and equipment for the countries you'll visit – even those that you'll be passing through. Some countries won't allow you to bring in certain medications and there may also be limits to how much you can bring in. Contact the embassies of all the countries that you'll be in – there's a list at www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-

embassies-in-the-uk, and there's also information at www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/advice/general-travel-health-advice/travelling-with-medicines.aspx.

If you're travelling within the UK, it's a good idea to carry a spare prescription with you. Don't forget that, as long as you give permission, the pharmacist can phone your GP and check what you need.

Flying Pack your medication in your hand luggage (but check the airline's regulations before travelling). You can carry more than 100 ml of your medications, but you'll need to get approval beforehand from the airline and airport and you'll need a letter from your doctor or a prescription with your medication.

Pack a spare supply of medication in luggage that will go into the hold (together with another copy of your prescription) in case you lose your hand luggage.

Keeping medication at the right temperature
If you are concerned that you may not be able to keep your medication at the right temperature while travelling, ask your pharmacist for advice. A small cool bag may be a good investment.

If you're going for a long time Check whether you'll be able to get your medication locally. It's useful to know the generic name (this is the chemical name rather than the brand name – it's usually written after the brand), as the brand names may be different from the ones in the UK.

Staying safe

Blood clots Some people with cancer have a higher risk of developing a blood clot (deep vein thrombosis or DVT). Sitting still on a long journey can increase this risk. Ask your nurse specialist or doctor if you need to be extra vigilant about this. Anyone can be affected by a blood clot, though, so it makes sense for all travellers to take precautions on long journeys – the NHS has more information about symptoms and how to reduce the chances of a blood clot at www.nhs.uk/conditions/deep-vein-thrombosis-dvt/.

Reducing the chance of an infection while abroad

- Drink plenty of fresh clean water – use your own water bottle or buy sealed bottles
- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand wash; always wash your hands before you eat
- Don't stand or swim in rivers, streams or lakes that have sewage or animal faeces in them
- Wear insect repellent (preferably one containing DEET) and cover arms and legs to protect against insects and ticks where necessary

AVOID:

- Cooked food that has cooled down (such as street food)
- Fruit that hasn't been washed in clean water and peeled
- Raw vegetables and salads
- Unpasteurised dairy foods, such as milk or cheese
- Ice in your drinks (unless made from purified water)

KEEP TO:

- Canned or unopened bottled drinks (water, juice, carbonated mineral water, soft drinks)
- Drinks made with boiled water, such as tea and coffee



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Infections Some cancer treatments make you more likely to pick up an infection. If your doctor or nurse thinks that it's okay to travel, take sensible steps to reduce the chance of becoming ill (see Box 1)

Taking care in the sun Some of the treatments for bladder cancer can affect your sensitivity to sunlight, and these effects can last for years after treatment. If you've had chemotherapy or radiotherapy or have used targeted or biological therapies, ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice. If you've had radiotherapy, keep the area that was treated covered up. Otherwise, follow the usual guidelines – use and re-apply a sun cream with a high sun protection factor (at least 30), keep covered or shaded if you can and wear a hat with a brim (see www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/sunscreen-and-sun-safety). Make sure you keep hydrated.

If you become unwell while you're away

If there's a receptionist or travel rep, ask them to call a doctor for you. If you need urgent help, you'll need to go through the emergency services or go to the emergency department of the nearest hospital.

If you need to contact someone in the UK because you're ill, or you need to return home urgently, the British Embassy in the country should be able to help – details can be found at www.consular-appointments.service.gov.uk/fco/#!/fco-consular-parent-account/-/company_list



More information

As well as information about bladder cancer and treatments, our website has other information sheets that you might find helpful. You can also find your nearest bladder cancer patient support group.

Other charities have travel advice and tips.

- **Cancer Research UK** at www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/coping/practically/travelling-with-cancer
- **Macmillan Cancer Support** at www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/organising/travel-and-holidays
Macmillan also offer one-off grants to help with the cost of a break for people on low income
www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/organising/benefits-and-financial-support/benefits-and-your-rights/macmillan-grants.html
- **Maggie's** has information here www.maggiescentres.org/cancerlinks/living-cancer/money-work-and-travel/travel-and-cancer/
- **Urostomy Association** at <https://urostomyassociation.org.uk/information/top-tips-urostomyassociation/>

NHS and other organisations also have some helpful information.

- **ABTA**, which represents travel operators and travel agents, has information about accessible travel at <https://abta.com/tips-and-latest/accessible-travel>
- **NHS Direct Wales** at www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/travelhealth/TravellingWithCancer/
- **NHS Inform (Scotland)** at www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/cancer/practical-issues/travel
- **Fitfortravel** (from Health Protection Scotland), which has a lot of travel health information for people travelling abroad from the UK www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

The section for Immunocompromised Travellers is helpful for people with low immunity (as might happen after cancer treatment)