**The Do’s and Don’ts of Traveling with Medication**

For many travelers, it is necessary to carry medication for personal use across international borders. But the rules about prescription and non-prescription (or "over the counter") medications are different in each country. A drug that is common at home may be prohibited in your destination, or at least require a doctor's note explaining the need.

Travelers who violate medication transport rules may face serious consequences, even if the violation was unintentional. Drugs can be confiscated -- and in some cases -- criminal charges may be involved. These problems, however, can be prevented with a bit of preparatory work before departure.

“Before you travel, make a list of all the medications you take on a regular basis,” said Dr. Robert Quigley, Regional Medical Director, Americas Region, International SOS. “Include prescription and non-prescription drugs, such as pain relievers, antacids and vitamins.”

Perform these steps for each medication:

* Select which ones you will bring with you and learn their scientific names. Brand names differ from country to country.
* Gather an ample supply to last the entire trip, with a few spares if possible.
* Keep all drugs in their original packaging.
* Contact your embassy to determine whether any drugs on the list are restricted in your destination(s). For example, if you will travel to China, contact the Chinese embassy or consulate in your home country and ask about medication restrictions.
* If it is a prescription drug, make a copy of the script.
* Have your healthcare provider write a note (letterhead is best) describing the medicine and why you need it.
* Translate the note into English and the language of your destination(s).

“When deciding how strictly to follow the above protocol, consider how strongly you need the medication,” Quigley said. “It is an inconvenience if your headache medicine is confiscated during travel, but it is a serious health crisis if authorities confiscate a drug you take every day to manage diabetes, HIV or another chronic illness.”

Additional items to consider:

* Note the protocol steps are more critical if you are carrying an injectable drug or a controlled medication, such as a narcotic.
* Keep all medication in its original packaging. Pack a copy of your prescription with the drug. Place in your hand (carry on) luggage so that it stays with you the entire time. If this is a problem due to liquid restrictions or syringes, consult the transit crew for advice on where to store the medicine.
* Some travelers also pack extra medication in their checked luggage, in case their hand luggage is lost or stolen.

**Be aware of quality and counterfeits**

Drugs sold abroad are not always rigorously inspected, or manufactured using high quality methods. Counterfeit drugs are a worldwide problem. Some facilities may sell expired medicines, or products that have been ruined by improper storage. Since standards vary widely, it is best to pack enough medication to last the entire time you are away. Travelers should also pack a [basic drug/first aid kit](http://www.internationalsos.com/countryguide/traveladvice.aspx?languageid=ENG&content=travel&trvid=-100&trvcontid=25) for every trip.

Ideally, you should contact a travel assistance company (such as International SOS) for professional advice about reliable sources of medication. Sometimes, they can arrange to have medications from your home country delivered to you.

If it is impossible to contact your assistance company, consider consulting your home country's embassy at your destination. Staff may be able to direct you towards a reliable drug provider. Other sources of advice include the tourist information bureau, a respectable hotelier, or some other tourist-oriented businessperson.

**Rules vary between countries**

Some travelers forget that their home country also has medication rules and restrictions in place. If you have purchased medication abroad, check with authorities in your home country before returning. Ensure that the medicine you are carrying is permitted. If you are unsure, it may be best to discard the drug rather than attempt to bring it back with you.

The penalties for carrying illegal drugs vary widely by country and type of drug. These can include extreme measures such as imprisonment, corporal punishment, and possibly even execution. Occasionally, drug traffickers will attempt to involve tourists in the drug transport process. Never carry a package or luggage for someone else. Keep your luggage with you at all times, unless you have checked it with the transport company. This will minimize the risk of someone placing something inside your bag.

By following these simple tips and planning ahead, travelers can be better prepared so a medication emergency does not interrupt a business or pleasure trip.

More information and tips are available at [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com). Simply insert our membership number (XXXXXXXX) or visit our Intranet site at (insert link).

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