

Working to relieve the pressure!

Holidays provide a break from everyday routine and welcome rest, but before you travel there are a few things to consider. Many of the issues in this leaflet concern travelling abroad, but they may also apply when on holiday in the UK. There is no reason someone with IIH can't have a happy and incident free holiday. It's always best to be prepared.

Travelling in Europe: The EHIC

The EHIC (European Health Insurance Card) replaced the E111 form in January 2006 as the required documentation to receive free or reduced cost emergency healthcare while traveling in Europe. The EHIC is normally valid for three to five years and covers any medical treatment needed during your trip, due to illness or accident. The card gives access to state-provided medical treatment only, and you'll be treated on the same basis as an 'insured' person living in the country you're visiting.

To apply online for the E111, visit the Department of Health's website www.ehic.org.uk. You can apply by phone: 0845 605 0707. Make sure you have the information listed above ready. To apply by post, EHIC Enquiries, PO Box 1114, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE99 2TL or pick up the EHIC form and pre-addressed envelope from the Post Office.

Holiday Insurance

When travelling abroad with most travel companies it is a condition of booking that you have holiday insurance, either the tour operator's own policy or an equivalent policy with another company. You must read the small print to check what is covered. Many policies exclude pre-existing medical conditions and treatment arising from them, not informing your insurer of a pre-existing condition may invalidate your policy. Your insurer may request a letter from your doctor stating that you are fit to travel.

Some insurers specialise in insuring those with medical conditions, your travel agent might be able to recommend an insurance company. You may pay a little more than average travel insurance, but will have peace of mind knowing that you're fully covered.

Medication

- Make sure you have sufficient amounts of any medication you have to take regularly. Some medicines may not be available in other countries and you'll have to pay the full price for them from pharmacies.
- If you're flying, always carry your medication in your hand luggage. Keep your medication in their original containers so it's clear what they are and to minimise problems at Customs.
- Take a list of any medical conditions you've been diagnosed with and medications that you take.
- Similarly in case of difficulties at Customs, ask your GP or Consultant for a letter confirming the condition you suffer from and any prescribed medications you are taking (some countries insist on this). GPs may charge a small fee for this.
- Carry contact details for your GP and/or consultant with you. In an emergency medical staff may need to contact your doctor. Emergency alert jewellery in the form of necklaces or bracelets can be bought that alert medical staff to the fact that you have a medical condition or give details of medications that you take.

Activities while on holiday

Holidays can be a chance to try out new activities. If you have a shunt you should be especially cautious of the activities you take part in. Rollercoasters have a negative g-force and possible magnets so be wary and ask staff if you are unsure. Contact sports should be avoided if and activities where you may suffer falls etc. should probably only be undertaken if you've checked with your doctor prior to taking part. Scuba Diving may also cause problems and it is unlikely that your insurance will cover you for this if you have a shunt. Always check with your insurer first.

Other considerations

One question that many people ask is whether it's safe to fly with IIH. The answer in most cases is yes. Ensure that you have a letter from your Doctor confirming you are fit to fly before booking any tickets. Modern planes have pressurised cabins, which although not pressurised to sea-level pressures, shouldn't cause many problems. If you are uncertain, check with your doctor. Some people find that flying can cause a temporary worsening of their symptoms, but these usually resolve when the plane has landed.

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- The normal guidelines regarding long distance travel and particularly air travel apply. Try to take regular exercise while travelling. When seated, you can still help yourself to avoid the possibility of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) by moving your feet around to keep your circulation healthy. If you've recently had surgery and you should always check with your doctor before flying.
- Keep yourself well hydrated and avoid alcohol on flights, especially if you have a shunt or are on diuretics as dehydration can cause headaches.
- Buy some boiled sweets and take them with you to suck as these can help your ears when the plane is descending, also if possible take your pain medication half an hour before descent. Some chemists sell reusable flight ear plugs. These are designed to relieve the discomfort of air pressure changes and reduce the noise.
- When going on a package holiday, tell your holiday rep about any specific problems you might have.
- If you're prone to dizziness/nausea with IIH, before travelling you could ask your doctor to prescribe an Anti-sickness medication or use ordinary travel sickness pills, following the instructions carefully.
- If you are taking a prescribed diuretic, you may need to visit the "facilities" more often than your fellow travellers. If you're traveling by car, plan your journey with enough time for comfort breaks. If travelling by coach or air etc. it's a good idea to book an aisle seat.
- ...and once you're there, relax, enjoy your break - you deserve it!

Holiday checklist

- If you are a wheelchair user or cannot walk far without assistance, make sure you contact your airline in advance for assistance at the airport.
- Do you have a valid EHIC?
- Do you have adequate supplies of your medication? Have you packed your medication in your hand luggage?
- Ensure you carry your medication in their original containers.
- Do you need to take evidence of prescribed medications you take?
- Have you got your shunt card with you? Or evidence of the type of shunt you have?
- Do you have contact details for your GP/consultant with you?
- Do you have adequate travel insurance and are your insurers aware of any pre-existing conditions?
- Does anyone who is going on holiday with you know about IIH, its symptoms and help you might need?
- Have you allowed time for 'comfort breaks in your journey? Do you need an aisle seat?