

Script – Print – Pack smart for an allergy-safe vacation

A much-anticipated vacation should be about exploring new places and relaxing with family and friends – not scrambling to find a pharmacy because you forgot your allergy medication.

Whether you're headed for a tropical getaway or hiking through a national forest, a little preparation can go a long way toward keeping allergies from putting a damper on your trip, according to Stephanie Amor-Arteaga, APRN, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare. "The best way to prepare for a vacation is to plan if you have allergies," she says. "You want to make sure that you have enough medication, you've gotten your refills from your provider and you have enough to last you through the trip. Make sure everybody around you is aware of the allergies and what you have with you."

Because allergy triggers vary by season and destination, preparation starts before you leave home. Research where you're going to know your response to potential environmental allergies there and how to best cope. Before leaving home, Amor-Arteaga recommends putting together an allergy kit. Depending on your needs, that may include antihistamines, inhalers and epinephrine auto-injectors. Travelers should also bring a current medication list, emergency contacts and a medical alert bracelet or necklace, as well as hand sanitizer and wipes. Make sure all prescriptions are current and properly labeled in case your travel partners need additional information.

Amor-Arteaga says that if you're carrying prescription medications or over-the-counter medications, place them in your carry-on and not in your checked-in luggage for easy access. Depending on your ultimate location, other considerations to think about are pollen levels, air quality, what outdoor activities you have planned and possible allergens when it comes to hotel accommodations.

Once you've arrived at your destination it's time to think about where you're going to dine and what you're going to eat – especially if you're allergic to certain foods or ingredients. "If you have a food allergy, the best way to navigate that at a restaurant is to let the staff know about your allergy before you even start to order the food," says Amor-Arteaga. "I have a daughter with a food allergy, so I make sure to carry snacks that she's able to eat in case that restaurant does not have any options for her."

Amor-Arteaga knows firsthand how stressful traveling with a food allergy can be. Her daughter has a peanut allergy, and Amor-Arteaga remembers being nervous before their first big vacation to Disney World. "I just wanted to make sure there was no cross contamination, but they were very good about it," she says. "Most places are good about managing food allergies because they are common, unfortunately."

Amor-Arteaga suggests contacting your health care provider at least four weeks in advance of your trip so he or she can devise a personalized plan for you, including making sure all your prescriptions are filled.

The bottom line, Amor-Arteaga says, is that allergies shouldn't keep people from enjoying their time away. A little preparation before leaving home can help travelers spend less time worrying about their allergies – and more time making memories. "Allergies affect our lives, and it may be a bummer for some, but it should not affect a vacation if you plan and get everything in order so that you can enjoy time with everybody," says Amor-Arteaga.

Before you leave:

- Refill all prescriptions
- Pack medications in your carry-on
- Bring extra medication when appropriate
- Make sure prescriptions are properly labeled
- Carry a medication/allergy list
- Tell travel companions about your allergies
- Pack safe snacks if you have food allergies
- Bring emergency contacts
- Consider a medical alert bracelet or necklace