

Living with a Continent Ileostomy



Bill Van Clief served as controller and vice president of finance for three large hospitals. He was also a manager for a large public utility and is a practicing CPA. After being diagnosed with familial adenomatous polyposis at age 36, he became one of the earliest patients to get a j-pouch also known as an ileoanal anastomosis. Complications made it necessary to have the pouch removed and it was replaced with a continent ileostomy.

One of the benefits of a continent ileostomy (CI) is the minimal amount of supplies needed on a daily basis. This makes traveling, especially overseas or on extended trips, relatively easy. However, there are still important things to keep in mind. Allow me to highlight these by taking you on an imaginary European journey. All of what I am about to relate is based on actual experience and knowledge that I and others with this procedure have acquired.

European Vacation

In addition to the normal preparations for international travel, I will request diarrhea medications and also antibiotics from my doctor in case I get a bout of pouchitis (an inflammation or irritation in my internal pouch). An explanation of my procedure, supplies and medications on his letterhead might come in handy at security checkpoints.

I will purchase travel medical insurance since my policy only covers me in the U.S. When filling out the application, I will be sure to mention that I have a continent ileostomy (k-pouch or BCIR).

Fortunately, the few items needed to manage my CI take little space in my carry-on bag. Since catheters and syringes (for irrigating or flushing the pouch) are difficult to obtain "on the road," I pack several catheters and at least one syringe. Other supplies include stoma covers and lubrication for use in inserting my catheter. All of my supplies and medications fit in my carry-on bag easily so I don't have to worry about them getting lost or damaged.

At the Airport and on the Plane

I plan to arrive at the airport with



Budapest, Hungary

enough time to pass through the TSA check point and use the restroom before boarding the plane. Nothing will show on the body scanner display and my carry-on items should pass through without incident. If an agent has questions about my CI supplies, I am prepared to explain why they are needed or show them the letter from my doctor.

Shortly before boarding the plane, I will visit a restroom to empty. I plan to eat a light meal of foods that are not likely to make pouch emptying difficult. After emptying, I will wash my catheter in the restroom sink. While this may embarrass some people, I can do it quickly before anyone nearby realizes what I am doing.

I will ask the flight attendant for extra beverages to assure that I do not become dehydrated on the ten-hour flight. If the "call of nature" comes during my flight, I will bring my catheter, some lube and a 60ml syringe concealed in a small case to the lavatory. I also bring a bottle of water in case the water is unsuitable for drinking. Only potable water (fit for human consumption) can be safely used to irrigate a pouch and wash the catheter.

Travel in Destination Countries

I will visit Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech

Republic. Wherever I go, I will carry my catheter and other CI supplies in a small camera case. At the Frankfurt airport, I will rent a car and start driving to my next destination. If the need to use a restroom arises, a roadside rest stop will work fine. I anticipate as I travel eastward, public restrooms could deteriorate to having only a hole in the floor and no toilet. This really presents no problem since I can do my business standing up and I will always have some toilet paper to wipe off the catheter.

The first night will be at a nice hotel in Regensburg, Germany. The breakfast buffet selection of meats, fruits and German pastries is outstanding. I plan to pay for my indulgence by using the restroom sooner than normal.

In Budapest, I will be taking extended sightseeing tours of the city. I really enjoy eating traditional Hungarian dishes at the local restaurants that are often flavored with paprika and other spices. My advice is to take a conservative approach when eating unfamiliar foods or dishes and eat smaller portions.

After leaving Budapest, I will enter the town of

Sighisoara, the reported home of Count Dracula (Vlad the Impaler) in Romania. If I run out of anything except catheters, I can improvise. Finding a catheter in Eastern Europe can be "Mission Impossible," so I guard mine with my life.

Prague in the Czech Republic will be the next stop. The bathroom facilities are limited and it's common to have to pay to use one. If they do not have a sink to wash my catheter, I can wipe it off with toilet paper and place it back in its case to be cleaned at the hotel. After leaving Prague, I will head back to Frankfurt to drop off the car and catch the plane home.

In Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed taking this "dream vacation" with me. My continent ileostomy allows me to focus on the events, opportunities, excitement and enjoyment of traveling. With a little planning, preparation and ingenuity, traveling in foreign countries is within reach. So, travel where you want, do all the activities you enjoy and eat a wide variety of the food specialties in the places you visit. 🍴

“My continent ileostomy allows me to focus on the events, excitement and enjoyment of traveling. With a little planning and ingenuity, traveling abroad is within reach.”