

TRAVEL SERVICES

Air travel, holiday planning, and support



This factsheet contains information on **travelling with a long-term health condition**, including:

- Air travel and conditions which may affect your ability to fly
- Travelling abroad while using oxygen therapy or medical devices
- Things to consider when travelling abroad
- Travel services which specialise in people with health conditions

It is aimed at anyone who has a chest, heart, or stroke condition, or who is suffering from Long Covid, and who wants to travel abroad. It also contains information which may be useful for domestic flights.

You may also want to check out our factsheet on **Travel and Motor Insurance**, which can be found online at [chss.org.uk/resources-hub](https://www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub)

IMPORTANT:

CHSS cannot offer medical advice on whether you are safe to fly. Consult your doctor or health team if you are unsure.

CHSS does not endorse or recommend any specific travel company. Companies are listed in alphabetical order.

The information in this factsheet is correct at time of publication. However, we cannot take responsibility for information that changes between publication and the scheduled review date for this factsheet (August 2025)

Air travel

Medical clearance to fly

Air travel may require medical clearance from the airline before travelling if:

- You have an unstable medical condition (new symptoms are appearing, or your symptoms are unpredictable)
- You have recently been admitted to hospital
- You have recently had surgery
- You will need oxygen or other medical equipment while on board the flight
- You will need medical treatment during the flight

If you are unsure whether you are fit to fly, contact the airline's medical department well in advance of your flight. This will allow the airline to assess your fitness to fly and provide you with medical clearance.

Getting in touch early will also allow the airline to provide you with any support you need during your flight, such as priority boarding or providing you with in-flight help.

There are two forms which the airline may ask you to complete as part of your medical clearance. These are the **MEDIF (Medical Information Form)** and the **INCAD (Incapacitated Travellers Handling Advice Form)**. You may have to complete either or both in advance of your flight. Try to be as honest as possible about your symptoms and needs, and ask your GP or specialist for help if necessary.

Different airlines have different policies on medical clearance. Some airlines may offer a **FREMEC (frequent travellers medical card)** if you fly a lot and have a stable health condition or disability. This card can be shown as evidence that you have previously been cleared to fly. FREMEC cards only work on the airline which issued them. If you are flying with a new airline, or transferring between airlines, you may still need to fill out a new medical clearance form.

Under some circumstances (particularly if you have an advanced terminal illness or severe disability, or if you require medical attention during the flight) the airline may require that you fly with a qualified medical escort. This is usually a nurse or carer.

Chest conditions

Most people with chest conditions are not affected by normal aircraft conditions. However, there are a few things to consider when flying with a chest or breathing condition:

- Because the cabin air is pressurised, not as much oxygen reaches your blood. If you need oxygen, make sure it is organised well in advance.
- Aircraft cabins have low humidity levels meaning that your sputum may become thicker. Drinking plenty of fluids will keep you hydrated and will help to loosen your sputum and allow you to keep your chest clear.
- It is safe to use any of your inhalers when flying; keep them with you, in your hand luggage, at all times.
- If you have had a recent exacerbation (flare-up) of your condition, you should be fully recovered before you fly.

Using oxygen when flying

If you use oxygen continuously, and need to access oxygen therapy while flying, you will need to **inform the airline when you book your seat**.

You **cannot use compressed gas or liquid oxygen** on most flights. Most UK companies which provide oxygen equipment also do not allow you to take equipment abroad. You will have to make sure that you have arranged a supplier for oxygen both on the flight and once you arrive.

Each airline will have its own policy regarding the supply and use of in-flight oxygen, e.g. what flow rates are available and what charges, if any, are applicable. Most airlines will only provide oxygen for the flight. If you need oxygen on the ground you will need to provide your own for any transfer between flights.

You may need oxygen while flying even if you do not use oxygen continuously in day to day life. This is because the air in an aeroplane during a flight is thinner and contains less oxygen than on the ground. If you have respiratory problems or are unsure about your breathing, speak to your doctor well in advance of travelling to see whether you need a **hypoxic fit-to-fly test**. This will tell you whether you need to arrange oxygen through the airline.

You can find more information, including a list of different airlines' policies, at the European Lung Foundation's page: www.europeanlung.org/en/information-hub/factsheets/air-travel-when-you-have-a-lung-condition/

Cardiac devices and other implants

Implanted cardiac devices - pacemakers, cardiac resynchronisation therapy (CRT) devices and implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICD) - are designed so that they should not be affected by the security screening equipment. To minimise the risk of temporary interference when going through airport security screening:

- Tell one of the security staff that you have an implanted cardiac device and show them your identification card.
- Avoid touching metal surfaces around any screening equipment.
- If asked to do so, walk through the screening archway at a normal pace; it will not harm your device. Do not stay near the archway any longer than is necessary. The metal casing of your device may set off the security alarm.
- Metal detectors can **very rarely** affect how your cardiac device works. If a handheld wand is used, ask the staff to avoid holding it over your device or the area surrounding it, or consider asking them to hand-search you instead.

If you have concerns about the security screening speak to a member of the security staff team who will help you to negotiate the necessary security checks. Once on board the aircraft, your devices will not cause any interference to the aircraft's electronic systems.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot which can sometimes occur as a result of sitting still for long periods of time, especially during a long-distance flight. The following simple measures will help reduce the risk of a DVT:

- Avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids throughout the journey; if necessary, take your own bottle of water and take regular sips.
- Remember that alcohol and caffeine can contribute to dehydration.
- Bend and stretch your legs and wiggle your feet at regular intervals (for example every 30 minutes) to encourage your circulation.

Some people have a higher risk of developing DVTs. Your doctor can help you work out what measures you may need to take prior to flying. This may include graduated compression stockings, aspirin or anticoagulants.

Travelling after a stroke

The UK Civil Aviation Authority recommends that you wait 10 days after a stroke before flying. This is because this is the time when you are most likely to have another stroke.

If your stroke was mild, you may be able to fly as little as three days after being discharged from hospital. However, this should only be done under the explicit instruction of a doctor.

You should always speak to a doctor to make sure that you are safe to fly.

A stroke can leave you with motor problems or communication difficulties. There are some things that you can do to make travel easier:

- Try to travel with a carer or another person you trust. Many airlines will offer some support for you to be seated next to your carer if you tell them why it is needed.
- Ask the airline or airport in advance whether they can offer mobility devices or other support with boarding and flying.
- It may be helpful to have something to support your communication, such as a conversation support booklet (available from CHSS. A communication support booklet is a book of words and images that lets you point to common words or concepts) or other communication support.

Make sure that you have informed the airline ahead of time if you have had a recent stroke or TIA (transient ischaemic attack).

If you have had a stroke, or are considered at high risk of a stroke, it is best to ensure that you have medical details readily available - consider buying a medical alert bracelet or writing your doctor's details down and keeping them with your passport.

However, flying does not significantly increase your risk of stroke.

Before you fly

- Make sure you have alerted the airline to your condition and filled out any forms that may be required.
- Ask your doctor for a letter which details your medical condition(s) and any medications or treatments you need.
- Make sure you have travel insurance which covers your medical condition(s) - see our factsheet on **Travel & Motor Insurance** for more information.
- Inform the airline if you need a nebuliser or oxygen tank.
- Arrange any transport you may need within the airport, e.g. between gates.

At the airport

- Try to arrive at your gate early if possible. This gives you more time to get organised and deal with any paperwork.
- Keep all drugs/medications in your hand luggage if possible. This is especially important for medications which you may need during the flight. **You will only be able to take small amounts (100ml) of liquid through security.** Check with your airline in advance what is allowed.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing when you travel.
- Drink plenty of water or other non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated drinks before your flight. This prevents dehydration, which can make respiratory symptoms worse, during the flight.

Things to consider when travelling abroad

Before going overseas, make sure you have thought about the following:

Travel insurance

You will need travel insurance before going abroad. This will cover you if you fall ill or experience a flare-up of symptoms while you're away, if you need to go to hospital, or to help replace your ticket if you cannot make your original return flight as a result of health issues. Travel insurance can also help to pay for repatriation (returning your body home) if you die while abroad.

Make sure that your insurance covers your health condition(s), as well as any dangerous activities you may be doing on your holiday, such as skiing or climbing. It is also helpful to check that your insurance covers changes in coronavirus restrictions.

You can find out more about travel insurance by reading our factsheet on **Travel and Motor Insurance**.

Healthcare abroad

Healthcare for UK citizens is not free when travelling abroad. If you fall ill or need treatment for your existing health condition(s), you may need to pay for healthcare.

This can be covered in whole or in part by your travel insurance (see above). Alternatively, if you are travelling in an EU country or in Switzerland, you can apply for a UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). This replaces the old E111 card which was used up until 2005, and allows you to access public healthcare services in the EU. Find out more about the GHIC at: www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic

It can also help to research the country and region you are visiting, to make sure of who to contact if you need medication or non-emergency treatment while abroad.

Accommodation

When booking your accommodation, make sure you have accounted for any mobility needs or other health provisions you might need. If you are staying at a hotel or B&B and you use oxygen, it is often helpful to tell the hotel/host before you arrive, so that they can ensure that they are able to support you if necessary, and also that their insurance covers the additional fire risk.

Emergency contacts

Before travelling, especially if you are travelling alone, ensure that you know who can be contacted in an emergency. This might be a friend, family member, or neighbour. Note down their name, and how they can be contacted, on a piece of paper or inside your passport. Carry these details with you while travelling.

If you have a specialist doctor or nurse who handles your health condition(s), you should note down their name and professional contact details as well. This allows medical professionals where you are staying to reach out if they need to know your history or current treatments.

When travelling abroad, remember that any UK phone numbers should be written with the UK country code (+44) replacing the 0 at the beginning of the number.

Medication

Before leaving for your holiday, ensure that you have all medications you may need. This includes medication for treating flare-ups and acute symptoms, as well as any regular medication.

Make sure you refill your prescriptions soon before leaving. Consider how long you are planning to be away, making sure you have **enough medications to last the full length of your trip, plus 1-2 weeks to allow for any delay**. You may have to ask your doctor whether you can be given a larger prescription than usual.

Check to see whether your medication is prescribed in the country you are visiting, and where the nearest local doctors are, just in case you lose or run out of your medications. Remember to keep medication in your hand luggage when flying so that you are less likely to lose it.

Vaccinations

When going abroad to certain countries, you may need certain vaccinations. This is especially important for people with long-term health conditions.

Before booking your holiday, speak to a pharmacist or travel clinic about what vaccinations are required for your trip. Note that GP clinics no longer offer these vaccinations, which are now given out through the local health board. Some of these vaccinations may need to be administered weeks before you travel, so don't delay!

Many airlines and hotels will also require you to provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination. If you do not have a vaccination certificate, you can find out how to get one at www.nhsinform.scot/nhs-scotland-covid-status, or ask your doctor or pharmacist.

International travel services

ABTA

A webpage of guidance on how to work with your travel provider to ensure you have support while travelling. Also lists your legal rights.

www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/accessible-travel

Access World Travel

A travel agency which specialises in personalised packages for people with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

www.accessworldtravel.co.uk

Email: info@accessworldtravel.co.uk

Tel: 0330 350 1324

Altogether Travel

Founded in 2011, this is a specialist supported travel service able to provide advice, support, and care to travellers with additional health needs.

www.altogethertravel.co.uk

Email: info@altogethertravel.co.uk

Tel: 0141 406 1821

Disabled Holidays

The UK's largest specialist travel agent for domestic and international holidays with accommodation for disabilities and health problems.

www.disabledholidays.com

Enable Holidays

Disabled holiday specialists providing accessible tailor-made holidays for wheelchair users, with guaranteed adapted accommodation.

www.enableholidays.com

Email: enquiries@enableholidays.com

Tel: 08712 224 939

Helping Hands Home Care

A private home care service which can offer temporary personal assistants or carers for holidays in the UK or abroad.

www.helpinghandshomecare.co.uk/home-care-services/carer-supported-holidays

Saga Travel

Offers UK, overseas, special interest and group holidays and cruises for those over 50 in the UK. Accommodation is not guaranteed to be suitable for disabled travellers and it is advisable to check before booking.

www.travel.saga.co.uk
Tel: 0800 300 500

UK holiday services

Accessible Holiday Escapes

A website designed to help you search for accommodation which meet specific access requirements.

accessibleholidayescapes.co.uk
Email: hello@accessibleholidayescapes.co.uk
Tel: 07838 215558

The Calvert Trust

An organisation which has three specialised accessible activity centres. These centres offer a range of supported outdoors activities and events, and are friendly to individual, family, or group bookings.

www.calvert-trust.org.uk

Calvert Trust Kielder, Northumberland - **Tel: 01434 250 232**
The Lake District Calvert Trust, Cumbria - **Tel: 01768 772 255**
Calvert Trust Exmoor, Wistlandpound, Devon - **Tel: 01598 763 221**

Euan's Guide

A review website that collects and shares disability access information for venues, businesses, and events all around the UK and beyond.

www.euansguide.com

Revitalise

A specialist charity which offers accessible holidays to people with long-term conditions and their carers. They have three holiday centres in England.

www.revitalise.org.uk

Email: bookings@revitalise.org.uk

Tel: 03033 030 145

Tourism for All

A UK-wide charity dedicated to accessible tourism, including advice and support with planning your trip.

www.tourismforall.co.uk

Tel: 0303 303 0146

Visit England

The national tourism service for England, which has a dedicated page to planning an accessible trip in England.

www.visitengland.com/plan-your-visit/access-all/accessible-england

Visit Scotland

The national tourism service for Scotland, which has a dedicated page to planning an accessible trip in Scotland.

www.visitscotland.com/holidays-breaks/accessible

Visit Wales

The national tourism service for Wales, which has a dedicated page to planning an accessible trip in Wales.

www.visitwales.com/inspire-me/holidays/accessible-holidays