

Going on holiday with a health condition

Chest
Heart &
Stroke
Scotland



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Key Points

- When travelling by air check whether you will need medical clearance. Get in touch with the airline you plan to use to find out.
- Implanted cardiac devices are designed so that they should not be affected by the security screening equipment in an airport. You should tell the security staff if you have one.
- Make sure you refill your prescriptions before going on holiday if you can.
- Bring emergency contact details with you, like a family member or friend.

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

CHSS does not endorse or recommend any specific travel company. The information in this factsheet is correct at time of publication. We do not take responsibility for information that changes between publication and the scheduled review date for this factsheet.

Travelling by air

When you travel by air you may require medical clearance. If you are unsure whether you are fit to fly, contact the airline's medical department in advance of your flight. Getting in touch early will allow the airline to provide you with any support you might need, such as priority boarding or providing you with in-flight help.

You may require medical clearance 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 or had surgery.
- You will need oxygen or other medical equipment while on board the flight.
- You will need medical treatment during the flight.

Different airlines have different policies on medical clearance. Some airlines may ask you to complete two forms as part of your medical clearance:

- MEDIF (Medical Information Form).
- INCAD (Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice Form).

Other airlines may offer a FREMEC (frequent travellers medical card) if you fly a lot and have a stable health condition or disability. FREMEC cards only work on the airline which issued them.

If you are flying with multiple airlines, e.g., transferring between flights, you may need to fill out new medical clearance forms for each one.

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

Flying with a chest condition

Most people with chest conditions are not affected by normal aircraft conditions.

There are still a few things to consider:

- Cabin air is pressurised so not as much oxygen reaches your blood. If you need oxygen, make sure it is organised in advance.
- Low humidity levels mean your sputum may become thicker. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated and loosen your sputum.
- It is safe to use your inhalers when flying, keep them in your hand luggage.
- If you had a recent flare-up of your condition, recover fully before you fly.

Using oxygen

If you need to access oxygen therapy while flying, you will need to inform the airline when you book your seat. You will have to make sure you have arranged a supplier for oxygen both on the flight and once you arrive:

- You cannot use compressed gas or liquid oxygen on most flights.
- Most UK companies which provide oxygen equipment do not allow you to take it abroad.
- Most airlines will only provide oxygen for the flight.
- You will need to arrange your own oxygen if you need it for transfers between flights.
- You may need oxygen while flying even if you do not use oxygen continuously in day-to-day life.

If you have concerns 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/living-with-a-lung-condition/air-travel/.

Cardiac devices and other implants

Implanted cardiac devices are designed so that they should not be affected by the security screening equipment in an airport. These devices include:

- Pacemakers.
- Cardiac resynchronisation therapy (CRT) devices.
- Implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICD).

When going through airport security you should:

- Tell one of the security staff 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. Do not stay near the archway any longer than is necessary. The metal casing of your device may set off the security alarm.
- Ask the staff to avoid holding a handheld wand over your device or the area surrounding it. Consider asking them to hand-search you instead. Metal detectors can **very rarely** affect how your device works.

Speak to a member of the security team if you have any concerns and would like support negotiating the security checks. Once on board the aircraft, your devices will not cause any interference to the aircraft's electronic systems.

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

DVT is a blood clot that can sometimes occur after sitting still for a long period of time, especially during a long-distance flight.

These simple measures can help reduce the risk of a DVT:

- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids throughout the journey to avoid dehydration. You could bring your own water bottle and fill it up in the airport.
- Remember that alcohol and caffeine can contribute to dehydration.
- Bend and stretch your legs and wiggle your feet regularly to encourage your circulation. For example, every 30 minutes.

Your doctor can help you identify what measures you may need to take prior to flying if you have a higher risk of developing DVTs. This might include:

- Graduated compression stockings.
- Aspirin.
- Anticoagulants.

Travelling after a stroke

The UK Civil Aviation Authority recommends that you wait at least 2 weeks after a stroke before flying. This is because this is the time you are most likely to have another stroke. You should always speak to a doctor to make sure that you are safe to fly.

Flying does not significantly increase your risk of stroke.

Here are some things you can do to make travel easier:

- Tell the airline in advance if you have had a recent stroke or transient ischaemic attack.
- 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 about mobility devices or other support with boarding and flying.
- Bring a communication support booklet or tool if you find that helpful. For example, our **Conversation Support Booklet**.
- Have your medical details readily available. You could buy a medical alert bracelet or keep your doctor's details with your passport.

Checklists for air travel

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 **Finding Inclusive 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 may 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-cafeinated drinks before your flight. This prevents dehydration, which can make respiratory symptoms worse, during the flight.

Things to consider when travelling abroad:

Travel insurance

Make sure your insurance covers your health condition(s) as well as any dangerous activities you may be doing on your holiday.

You can find out more about travel insurance in our **Finding Inclusive Insurance Factsheet**.

Healthcare abroad

This is not free when travelling abroad. It can be covered in whole or in part by your travel insurance.

If you are travelling to an EU country, Switzerland or certain other countries, you can apply for a UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). A GHIC allows you to access public healthcare services in these countries. Some of these countries will also accept a European Health Insurance Card if it is still valid.

Find out more about the UK Global Health Insurance Card through the NHS.

You can find out more about healthcare abroad in our **Finding Inclusive Insurance Factsheet**.

Accommodation

Make sure to account for any mobility needs or other health provisions when booking accommodation.

If you are staying in a hotel, hostel, or B&B and use oxygen it is often helpful to tell them before you arrive. This means they can ensure that they can support you if necessary and that their insurance covers the additional fire risk.

Emergency contacts

Write down the name and contact details of someone who can be contacted in an emergency. This might be a friend, family member or neighbour. Carry these details with you while travelling, especially if you are travelling alone.

If you have a specialist healthcare professional, you should carry their contact details on you as well.

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

Make sure you refill your prescriptions before leaving. Bring 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 if you can access your medication in the country you are visiting and how you could do this 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.

You may need to prove that it is your medication with either a prescription or letter from your doctor. Ask your doctor or pharmacist before you travel.

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. You will be able to access these vaccinations through your local health board. Some of these vaccinations may need to be administered weeks before you travel, so don't delay!

International Travel Services

ABTA

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

A webpage of guidance on how to work with your travel provider to ensure you have support while travelling. It also offers a list of your legal rights.

Altogether Travel

Website: www.altogethertravel.co.uk

Email: info@altogethertravel.co.uk

Tel: **0141 406 1821**

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

Enable Holidays

Website: www.enableholidays.com

Email: enquiries@enableholidays.com

Tel: **0330 380 6800**

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

UK Travel Services

Accessible Holiday Escapes

Website: accessibleholidayescapes.co.uk

Email: hello@accessibleholidayescapes.co.uk

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

Euan's Guide

Website: www.euansguide.com

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

Tourism for All

Website: www.tourismforall.co.uk

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

Visit England

Website: www.visitengland.com/info-advice/accessible-england

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

Visit Scotland

Website: www.visitscotland.com/travel-planning/responsible-tourism/accessible

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

Visit Wales

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

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

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Contact our Advice Line for information and support:

Tel: **0808 801 0899**

Text: **ADVICE** to **66777**

Email: **advice@chss.org.uk**

Find us on social media



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You can also go to our website for information, advice and support: **www.chss.org.uk**

Find a range of easy-to-read booklets and factsheets at our resources hub:

www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub



Scan here to see all our resources!

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Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland
2nd Floor, Hobart House
80 Hanover Street
Edinburgh EH2 1EL
Tel: 0131 225 6963

Scottish Charity Number: SC018761
Limited company number: SC129114

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Patient Information Forum