Section 13

Travelling with COPD

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1. British Lung Foundation: AIR TRAVEL WITH A LUNG CONDITION

Why does air travel affect people with lung conditions?
A small number of people with severe lung conditions may have difficulties travelling by air. This is because of the reduced air pressure in aircraft cabins.

People who have had infectious TB must not travel by air until shown to be non-infectious.

Anyone who has had a collapsed lung (pneumothorax) must not travel by air until their doctor tells them it is safe to do so.

Why does the lower pressure in aircraft cabins affect people with lung conditions?
Air pressure in an aircraft cabin is lower than air pressure at ground level. Being in an aircraft cabin is like being at 6000 to 8000 feet on a mountain. At high altitudes blood oxygen levels fall in everyone and some people may feel a little breathless. In most people this has no health effect. But if you already have low blood oxygen levels because of your lung condition, then the extra dip that happens while you are in the plane can cause more breathlessness and discomfort.

How do I know if I might have difficulty travelling by air?
People who can walk 100 metres on the level without needing oxygen, at a steady pace without feeling breathless or needing to stop, are not likely to be troubled by the reduced pressure in aircraft cabins. If you cannot do this, you will need to talk to your doctor regarding whether you should travel by air. You may need to have some breathing tests. These will show if a fall in your blood oxygen level is likely to be a problem to you while travelling by air. You should also visit your doctor before travelling if:
- you have had health problems when flying in the past
- have been in hospital recently with a lung or heart problem
- you have ever suffered from a clot in your leg, veins or lungs.

Can I use oxygen to help me when travelling by air?
Yes. If tests show that your usual blood oxygen levels are so low that air travel may be a problem for you, you may still be able to travel by air, if oxygen is provided for you. Airlines can arrange extra oxygen, but remember that most will charge. Different airlines have different charges; check with each one before you arrange your flight.

Arrangements for oxygen must be made by your travel agent usually when booking your ticket, but at least one month before your trip. Do not trust to luck that planes will have oxygen on board. They carry emergency supplies but not enough for several hours. You will need permission from the airline to take on board and use any electrical equipment you need for your treatment. Equipment must be battery driven, and you will not be allowed to use it during take off or landing. Using an inhaler with a spacer is just as effective as using a nebuliser.
Does the length of the flight make a difference?
Longer flights may carry health risks for anyone, because of the health effects of long periods sitting without much exercise. There is no evidence of extra risk for people with a lung condition, except for people with lung cancer who are more prone to Deep Vein Thrombosis (clots in the veins).

What happens if I get a chest infection while on holiday?
Any chest infection should be completely treated before you fly home. You should have medical approval before flying home.

Am I covered by medical insurance for any delays or difficulties due to my chest condition while on my trip?
You may not be. Check your travel insurance policy. Make sure you are fully covered for any medical costs that arise in connection with your lung condition. It is important that your travel medical insurance includes the cost of return by air ambulance if you were to become too ill to return on a commercial flight. Some policies exclude costs from pre-existing health conditions. Many policies will not cover you for costs from your lung condition unless you have a written note from your doctor that he or she feels you are fit to fly.

What else should I remember before flying?
- Ask your doctor well in advance for a letter to take in your hand luggage with details of your condition and medication.
- Be sure to take your inhalers in your carry-on bags. One of the most common problems is that people pack their inhalers in the luggage that goes into the hold.
- If you get breathless when walking, make sure you have help at airports.
- Distances to departure gates can be long. Disabled assistance at airports can be arranged before you travel.
- When you are in the aeroplane try to move about every hour or so and exercise your legs. Sitting for too long can lead to blood clots in the legs.
- Drink plenty of water and non-alcoholic drinks during the flight.
- Remember the golden rule: If in doubt about travelling, check with your doctor.
2. **British Lung Foundation: GOING ON HOLIDAY WITH A LUNG CONDITION**

**How do I know if I can travel?**

First, ask your doctor whether you are fit enough to travel, especially if you want to fly or travel abroad. You may be asked to take some tests.

If you can travel, your doctor should give you written consent to do so as this will save time later. If you will need oxygen, your doctor will inform you of your requirements.

If you are on oxygen therapy already, you need to make arrangements with your oxygen supplier.

**Where can I holiday?**

The world is your oyster. However, you may need to consider the following factors before traveling:

- **Climate** - Many people with lung conditions prefer warm climates that are not too hot and do have salty air. Lower oxygen levels at higher altitudes can make breathing difficulties worse.

- **Terrain** - Whether your destination is flat or on a hill could affect your ability to get around comfortably.

- Wheelchair access.

- Transport availability.

Your doctor, travel agent or holiday company can provide more details.

**Holiday tips**

- **Plan in advance** - If you leave things to the last minute, you could forget something crucial. Think about how far you can walk, how many stairs you can manage, access to toilets and what transport you can use. You must arrange full travel insurance for you and any companion before you go.

- **Be realistic** - Places you liked in the past may not be suitable now. Pick something you can cope with physically.

- **Shop around** - Everybody has different policies for people with lung disease, so find the best deal for you. Many travel agents offer holidays for people with special requirements.

- **Ask questions** - Travel companies are used to dealing with special requirements. Be tough in asking what you can reasonably expect from them.
HOLIDAYING IN THE UK AND ABROAD

HOLIDAYS IN THE UK

How do I choose my accommodation?

In the UK the ‘Tourism for All National Accessible Accommodation Standard’ assesses accessibility of all accommodation, including self-catering.

It puts it into three categories:

**Category One** – accessible to a wheelchair user travelling independently.

**Category Two** – accessible to a wheelchair user travelling with assistance.

**Category Three** – accessible to someone of limited mobility but able to walk a few paces and up to a maximum of three steps.

The Holiday Care company (now part of Tourism For All) and local Tourist Boards inspect this standard, so contact them for suitable places to stay.

How do I get to my destination?

**Car**

Before you travel, get the car checked and/or serviced. Plan ahead – check the accommodation is suitable for you and see if your insurance company requires a green card for car insurance.

Blue (formerly orange) badges are valid across Europe and in most of the rest of the world. Check with the country’s embassy before you travel and make a point of remembering to take them with you.

**Coach**

Several coach companies are working towards making their coaches accessible for people with disabilities.

Many National Express coaches now feature kneeling suspension, which makes boarding and alighting easier.

Most on-board toilet facilities are now level with the coach seating. If you give notice of your requirements when booking, you can get help with boarding and with folding wheelchairs. National Express does not carry battery-powered wheelchairs.

Smaller coach companies may not yet have the facilities you require. Telephone them in advance and ask about boarding and alighting, whether you can use on-board toilets and whether you will be able to take and use oxygen.
**Trains**
If you are thinking of travelling by train, get the leaflet Rail Travel for Disabled Passengers, available from most staffed railway stations, Citizens Advice Bureaux, some libraries, [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) (go to passenger services) or telephone 08457 48 49 50. This tells you the minimum level of service you can expect throughout Britain’s rail network.

However, different companies have different policies towards people with disabilities, so plan your route in advance and find out which companies’ trains you need. If you do not know, call National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50. All rail companies offer assistance to customers if pre-booked.

When contacting train companies, tell them where and when you want to travel, your disability, how you intend to get to and from the station, whether you are travelling alone or not and whether you need a wheelchair.

A Disabled Persons Railcard is valid for 12 months and offers up to a third off a range of train tickets. You may be eligible; ask your local station for a form, go to [www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk) or telephone 08457 48 49 50.

Eurostar trains have been designed to cater for passengers with special requirements. Some coaches have wheelchair access and permit oxygen containers. If travelling further afield in Europe, contact the appropriate European train company for its policy on travelling with oxygen.

**Ferries**
If you are going to one of Britain’s islands or travelling to or from Northern Ireland, you may be going by ferry. Many ferry companies have lifts, toilets and wheelchair facilities; some can supply wheelchairs at terminals. A few have special cabins for disabled people and/or offer discounts. They can also give priority loading and special parking spaces to disabled vehicles. Check before and when you book, especially if you need oxygen. Some companies make special provision for people with breathing difficulties. P&O Stena Line can help with oxygen if you tell them at least 48 hours in advance, while SeaFrance has a mobility bus which gives easier access to ferries if requested 24 hours in advance. Don’t forget to ask for extra assistance from the crew before you travel.

**How can I get around?**
Disabled scooters let you cover more ground and you won’t have to worry about finding places to sit. You can hire them in the UK from various companies at a cost of around £50 per week, but make sure there is somewhere in your accommodation where they can be stored and recharged.

**Getting oxygen in the UK**
Your oxygen supply company will make arrangements for you to receive oxygen if you are going on holiday in the UK (or abroad). Call them well in advance to discuss how they will handle your needs.
HOLIDAYS ABROAD

Many people with lung disease think they cannot travel abroad. This is not true! As in the UK, packages differ, so shop around. Consult your doctor before deciding where to travel and always check arrangements in advance.

Flying with a lung condition
Many people feel their lung disease stops them flying. This is not necessarily true.

Where do I begin?
First, ask your doctor whether you can travel by plane. Most people with lung disease can go on planes, even if they need oxygen. Once your doctor gives you the OK, contact individual airlines. Many have a medical officer or dedicated unit for disabled passengers.

Airlines often need to know how much oxygen you need, whether you need it intermittently or continuously, the duration of your flight, your route and whether you are travelling alone or with a companion. Most airlines can make special provision for passengers with breathing difficulties. Some of the larger airlines have dedicated helplines. Websites will also provide company guidelines.

When you contact the airline, find out what is available at the airport as well as on the plane. Important things to know include:

- What the airline’s policy is on oxygen. Taking oxygen on a plane can be easy and free, or difficult and expensive. Some airlines will not allow oxygen on the plane at all. It depends on the airline. You must find out before you book a ticket. This may also affect your choice of destination.

- The exact length of the flight, and whether delays are likely.

- The facilities available in place at both airports. This includes assistance required with luggage, boarding the aircraft, wheelchair requirements and whether oxygen is available. If the holiday involves a long-haul flight, you should find out if time will be spent at a third airport for refuelling and how oxygen will be supplied there if required. With the exception of oxygen provision, these services will usually be free.

- How you confirm your fitness to fly. Some airlines let you travel without a letter from your doctor, while others ask you to fill in a special medical form, verified either by your own GP or by the airline’s medical staff. Most ask for a fitness to fly certificate, obtained from your doctor.

Some do’s and don’ts

- If you need an inhaler or other medication, take it in your carry-on bag. Don’t put it in the hold.

- On the aeroplane, move about every hour and exercise your legs. Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids to combat dehydration, especially on long-haul flights.

- If you need a portable nebuliser, check if you can carry it into the cabin of the plane and whether it will cost extra.
Getting oxygen abroad
As of 1st of February 2006, your UK oxygen supplier has a duty to enable you to get oxygen abroad. Speak to them well in advance for details, including how to get help should you need it while on holidays. If travelling by car ask about any special equipment you may need to equip your vehicle with.

What if I get a chest infection or fall ill abroad?
Any chest infection should be completely treated before you fly home. You should have medical approval before flying home. Check whether your medical insurance covers you for any problems.

As of 1st of January 2006 the E111 form was replaced by the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). This entitles you to reduced cost, sometimes free medical treatment if you fall ill when travelling in Europe. You can apply for the EHIC by picking up an application form at any Post Office.

Further Information
www.european-lung-foundation.org provides detailed information on air travel with oxygen.

Case study
Susie is in her mid-fifties and has severe bronchiectasis. She takes three times the amount of drugs she used to, owing to complications with the condition. She prefers travelling by car.

“I love travelling to France and Italy with my husband. I find the roads are much more user friendly than Britain’s. A month before travelling, I made our plans. We wanted to travel through France, Switzerland and Italy by car.

“So I spoke with my lung specialist, who gave me a letter and materials to use if there was an emergency. We split the journey into manageable segments and planned our accommodation in advance. We found people to be very helpful.

“The AA planned our route around my condition. It was well worth it. We got a list of where to go, what to see and the amenities for people like me.

“We entered and left the UK by Le Shuttle. This is great. You do not have to leave your car. It is extremely quick – 40 minutes in total. The tunnel is not claustrophobic and, if you declare your disability, you are first on and first off.

“When we got to a villa in Tuscany, our host prepared a sumptuous meal. He also helped us if there were any problems. We met several wonderful people and had a fantastic time.

“With a bit of thought and careful planning most of us can break out of this straitjacket of lung disease, for a little while at least. So go for it!”
Useful Contacts

People living with a lung condition can have enjoyable holidays at home and abroad. Preparation is the key. Plan your trip in advance, think through everything you need, ask as many questions as you can, check with as many people as possible, then decide what is best for you. Always make a list before you travel and check it off as you go. Always tell a friend where you are.

Tourism For All
(A national registered charity providing information about accommodation/tourism services for older people and people with disabilities. ‘Holiday Care’ is part of Tourism For All)
Information Unit, 7th Floor, Sunley House, 4 Bedford Road, Croydon CR0 2AP
t: 0845 124 9971
e: info@tourismforall.org.uk
w: www.tourismforall.org.uk

P&O Ferries
t: 08705 980 333 (local rates apply)
w: www.poferries.com

Sea France
t: 08705 711 711 (national rates apply)
w: www.seafrance.co.uk

Brittany Ferries
t: 08703 665 333
w: www.brittany-ferries.co.uk

Channel Tunnel
Eurostar
t: 08705 186 186
w: www.eurostar.com

Euro Tunnel
t: 08705 35 35 35
w: www.eurotunnel.com

National Express
t: 08705 80 80 80
w: www.nationalexpress.com

Getting oxygen in the US
For details about traveling in the US, contact www.breathineasy.com. This offers a guide to traveling, especially with oxygen.
Sympathetic Insurance Companies

Most travel companies offer a very basic insurance cover and will not be able to accommodate individuals with specific health problems. This list can be used as a starting point to shorten the search for travel (and motor) insurance for people with chest, heart or stroke illness. Please note that details in this area change very quickly and are correct at the time of printing, entries being reviewed every six months and listed in alphabetical order. If you come across any changes to the details or would like a new contact to be included, please phone the Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland (CHSS) Adviceline on 0845 077 6000 and changes will be incorporated into the next print. CHSS does not make any specific recommendation or endorsements. The companies listed are for your information only. CHSS does not have the ability to help individuals with quotes, obtaining cover or making claims.

ALEXANDER FORBES MOBILITY SERVICES
4th Floor, Higham House, Newbridge Street West, Newcastle-upon Tyne NE1 8AN
Telephone: 0845 602 8000
Fax: 0191 261 3060

Electric wheelchair and scooter insurance

AGE CONCERN ENTERPRISES (SCOTLAND) LTD
Causwayside House, 160 Causwayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PR
Telephone: 0845 833 0758
Fax: 0845 833 0759

Website: www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk

Motor, motor breakdown, travel, home & contents insurance and funeral plans.

C.H FACILITIES LIMITED
PO Box 56, Poulton-Le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 7BH
Telephone: 0870 750 6711
Fax: 0870 750 6712
Email: insure@ch-travelcare.co.uk
Website: www.ch-travelcare.co.uk
Travel insurance for disabled drivers and for vehicles adapted for wheelchair use

**EN ROUTE INSURANCE CONSULTANTS**
Gro vemills, Cranbrook Road, Hawkshur st, Kent TN18 4AS
Telephone: 0800 783 7245
Fax: 01580 752 401
Email: info@enroute
Website: www.enrouteinsurance.co.uk
All insurance needs of disabled people. Motor, home, travel, wheelchair, scooter and home workers insurance.

**FISH INSURANCE**
2-4 Riversway Business Village, Navigation Way, Preston, Lancashire PR2 2YP
Telephone: 01772 733 773
Fax: 01772 733 773
Email: info@fishinsurance.co.uk
Website: www.fishinsurance.co.uk
Motor, wheelchair, scooter, equipment and carer insurance

**FREE-SPIRIT SOLUTIONS**
P J Hayman and Co Ltd, Standstead House, Rowlands Castle, Hapshire PO0 6DX
Telephone: 0845 230 5000
Fax: 02392 419 019
Email: freespirit@pjhayman.com
Website: www.free-spirit.com
Specialist travel insurance for people with pre-existing medical conditions

**MEDICOVER TRAVEL INSURANCE**
Customer service team: 0870 735 3600
Website: www.medi-cover.co.uk
Travel insurance for those who have suffered from illness or accident

**PHA TRAVEL**
Website: www.phatravel.com
POST OFFICE

Pick up the Travel Insurance leaflet from your post office. They have a Pre-screening Line 08701 212 962 you can phone to see if you can get cover.

SAGA INSURANCE

The Saga Building, Middelburg Square, Folkestone, Kent CT20 1AZ
Telephone General Enquiries: 0800 414 525
Email: services.sales@saga.co.uk
Website: www.saga.co.uk
Home, motor, travel, private medical etc.

VANTURESURE LTD

Stansted House, Rowlands Castle
Hampshire PO9 6DX
Telephone: 0845 230 3521
Fax: 0239 241 9019
Email: info@venturesure.co.uk
Website: www.venturesure.co.uk
Travel insurance for people with medical conditions

BANKS, BUILDING SOCIETIES AND CREDIT CARD COMPANIES

Many banks, building societies and credit card companies offer insurance services for their customers so it is worth checking to see what they can offer you as well.

GET AN E111 FORM

On 31 December 2005, your E111 will cease to be valid. From 1 January 2006, you will need an European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) to receive medical care that becomes necessary during your visit to an EEA Country (European Economic Area) or Switzerland. You can apply for an EHIC:

- by calling the EHIC Application Line on 0845 606 2030. Your card will be delivered in 10 days.
- By post – pick up an EHIC application pack from your local Post Office branch. Your card will be delivered within 21 days.
- The EHIC Enquiries Line will help with any other queries you may have: 0845 605 0707

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence, please call the Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland Advice Line Monday – Friday 9.30am – 12.30 and 1.30pm – 4.00pm