

Get Wise to flying with a disability

A guide to help you plan your flight to and from the UK



Flying is an essential and desirable form of transport for millions of UK citizens each year, whether for business, pleasure, family or health reasons.

Am I fit to fly?

Speak to your GP or consultant in the first instance. Airlines want to ensure that your condition is stable and may ask you a set of questions when you book. You can view specific flying advice related to your disability, for example at www.stroke.org.uk or www.bhf.org.uk. The UK Civil Aviation Authority www.caa.co.uk feature advice for disabled passengers before planning their journey.

Where do you want to fly to?

That is up to you! Bear in mind that each country's disability discrimination laws vary and it pays to research your own essential requirements before you fly. If you have not flown before or want further guidance, speak to specialist travel agents who are experienced in supporting disabled travelers for example: www.accessibletourism.org.uk; www.enableholidays.org.uk; www.accomable.com

What items can you take on the aircraft?

Flying to and from the UK you are allowed to take an additional two pieces of mobility equipment free of charge. This can include a wheelchair, a special seating system or specialised buggy. Always check with your airline when you book. Some travelers like to hire equipment instead at their destination. Consider www.mobilityequipmentthiredirect.com

Can I take my wheelchair?

Yes, you can take your manual or powered wheelchair. The airline you choose to fly with will ask about the make and model of your wheelchair, its weight and dimensions. If it is a powered chair, the airline will also need to ensure the batteries are safe in transit. You can look at www.bhta.com for information about your wheelchair and how it will need to be immobilised when stored in the aircraft hold. Consider the use of an Airsafe Plug www.flexelmobility.com. Take a copy of your wheelchair manual and notify your wheelchair services if it's not privately owned.

What medications can I take?

If taking over 100ml of medication you will need a doctor's letter. There is no limit to the amount you can take with you in the cabin. It's advisable to take a doctor's letter declaring medical implants and if you are travelling to Middle Eastern countries check the legality of any drugs you plan to bring with you. The UK CAA has an Aviation Health Unit for medical questions related to being in the cabin. Take essential prescriptions with you should you be delayed at your destination.



Selecting appropriate insurance

Always pre-disclose medical conditions. Consider the cover you will need not just for yourself but for your travelling companions, any staff accompanying you and essential equipment. Bear in mind that cover for some countries will cost significantly more than others and if airlines damage essential equipment there is an international limit to the amount they may reimburse you regardless of the value of your equipment. Speak to specialist disability/travel insurers for example www.fishinsurance.co.uk or www.freepirittravelinsurance.com

Booking your flight

Whether you book direct with the airline on your phone, via a travel agent or on-line, it is your responsibility to communicate your requirements at least 48 hours in advance of your journey – or preferably when you book. ‘Pre-notifying’ helps the airline and airport to plan the support you require for both outbound and inbound flights. Check your request for assistance has been received with your airline.

Arriving at the airport

According to European Law 1107/2006 you have the right to assistance from the time that you arrive at the airport. This can include getting from a nearby hotel to the terminal entrance. Take the time to look at the maps and videos of the airports you are using before your day of travel. These will show you where the special assistance receptions are and identify them.

Car parking

Take the time to see the arrangements your airports have in place if you are parking. Most will allow you to park at the short and long stay car park for

the normal fee. By prior arrangement you may take a copy of your blue badge on your journey. Take a look at www.theaa.com for advice on how you can use your Blue Badge abroad.

Requesting assistance when you arrive at the airport

However you arrive at your airport, you can request assistance from call points to help you make your way to the special assistance reception. Here, your assistance needs will be checked for your onward journey through the airport and boarding the aircraft. This can include chaperoning, support with carrying luggage and boarding.

Proceeding to check in

If you have luggage, you will need to visit the check in desk, so your bags can be stored in the hold. If not, it's likely you will have already checked in on-line and have either a printed or on-screen boarding pass. Remember that you can stay in your wheelchair all the way through to the aircraft door and that it will be tagged, in the same way that luggage is. You may be asked about your wheelchair dimensions and weight again.

Advice for travellers with Autism

Visit the airport before you travel. Take a look at the resources airports provide the autistic traveler, including videos and online checklists. Airport lounges can be a good investment for a place that is quieter and make a plan should your flight be delayed. Request special assistance before you travel. Consider a journey by coach, train or underground as a means of assessing you or your travelling partner's suitability if you have never flown. Bring items that sooth, relax or distract for the journey, and have a plan if your flight is delayed.



What happens at security?

It is likely you will be fast tracked - you may be invited to join a queue for families. You can remain in your wheelchair if you use one – the team will take a small swab and wipe it on an item of your clothing to check that you are not carrying any unauthorised substances. Before any ‘pat down’ inform the staff member of any particular requirements and if you wish this to be done away from the queue. Be prepared that security checks may be somewhat different when you return from your destination airport.



boarding depending on the aircraft type, what is available at the airport and their arrangement with the airport. Ask questions about the arrangement the airline has in place at your airports when you book your flight.

Waiting in the departure lounge

Once through security you will be in the departure lounge. Most airports have a prominent special assistance area where you can wait for information, or go shopping. Some provide a pager to notify you when you need to return. It is from here that you will board an airport buggy to take you to your gate.

Using the toilet

Check the facilities at the airports you are flying from, and to. While most should have accessible toilets, check with www.changing-places.org to find out the availability of full changing facilities.

Getting to the gate

Getting to your aircraft can involve surprisingly long distances. You may want to save your energy for another part of the journey so make the most of the assistance airports provide. Maps are available on line of the distances involved in travelling through airports to help you plan.

How you board the aircraft

There are different ways to board the aircraft; by using steps, an Ambulift, an Airbridge (or jetty), or an Aviramp (a portable slope). A stair climber is also available for smaller aircraft and airports. You may need to use a bus to get to the aircraft stand. It's important to know that airlines use different means of

Entering the aircraft and getting to your seat

Once you reach the outside of the aircraft, you will be welcomed on board by the aircraft cabin crew. Bear in mind that in the UK and Europe, if you require assistance, it will be the airport team that continue to assist until you get into your designated seat. If you use a wheelchair, you will now need to move into a transfer chair. The airport team will support you with your manual handling requirements. Communicate your requirements to the team before you are lifted. A more dignified transfer can be achieved with the use of a Promove sling www.promove.org.uk. Some UK and international airports also provide the mobile Eagle Hoist. Check for its availability at www.haycomp.com.au



Seating location in the cabin

Generally airlines want to seat you so that you have a short distance to travel from the front or rear of the aircraft. If you are travelling alone you will be asked to sit in a window seat in an economy seat configuration. There can be further restrictions on seating location due to cabin safety rules. Use www.seatguru.com to look at your seat choice ahead of your flight and always check with your airline.

Seating and leg room

The amount of room for your legs is measured as ‘seat pitch’ and not leg room. If you need additional support consider options including the Stabulo Cushion, Crelling Harness and MERU TravelChair for children. These are available to try ahead of your flight at QEF’s Tryb4uFly service www.tryb4ufly.org.uk. All aircraft seats will be required to be in an upright position for take-off and landing.



Preparing to land

If you use a wheelchair, remind cabin crew before you begin your descent that you will be expecting your wheelchair to be available immediately when you exit the aircraft.

Exiting the aircraft

If you are a wheelchair user or require assistance, anticipate exiting the aircraft last. Whilst this can result in a delay to your journey, often you will make up this time as you are escorted through the airport. Remember that your destination airport is likely to have different facilities and access options. Investigate these before your flight.

Using the toilet

Cabin crew can assist you getting to the door of the toilet using a narrow aisle chair. Toilets are small. If you have particular concerns we recommend speaking to your continence nurse/adviser. Some new aircraft have two adjacent toilets with a folding wall that provides double space including the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, depending on configuration.

If things don’t go as planned with your flight or at the airport

Always make a contingency plan if your flight is delayed, for whatever reason.

During the flight – accessing oxygen

If you require oxygen, speak with your airline. You cannot bring your own oxygen with you into the cabin for safety reasons.

Contact your airline or airport in the first instance if your journey does not go as planned. If they have not dealt with your complaint satisfactorily contact the UK CAA on-line or call 0207 4536888.

During the flight food and drink options

Discuss your requirements with your airline when you book. If there are any specific liquids or drinks that you need to bring and they exceed 100ml you will require a letter from your doctor.

Developed in partnership with QEF Tryb4uFly



www.bhta.com

The BHTA represent almost 500 companies, all of whom commit to the BHTA Code of Practice, the only one in this industry to be approved by The Chartered Trading Standards Institute. BHTA member companies operate to higher standards of customer protection than the law requires.

British Healthcare Trades Association
Suite 4.6 · 4th Floor · The Loom · 14 Gowers Walk
London · E1 8PY
T 020 7702 2141 · E bhta@bhta.com

