

TRAVEL TIPS

So you are planning to join us for the National Niemann-Pick Disease Foundation Annual Family Support and Medical Conference! As you plan your trip, you will need to take into account the needs of any family member who has a chronic medical condition. Unfortunately, unexpected medical emergencies can occur, for which travelers should prepare medical kits before departure.

Travelers with chronic illness or disabilities should request a medical summary of their condition from their doctor and carry it with them. Letters given to the patient and family by care providers which outline recommended medical emergency procedures should also be carried by the patient. Needed prescription medications and emergency plans should also be discussed during a Travel Planning Appointment with your doctor.

This list of tips and Web site resources has been compiled to assist you and assure that you have all of the important issues covered before you leave. Some tips apply to any travel away from home, while others apply specifically to air travel or international travel.

Accessibility Travel Checklist

By Barbara Ballard

As Susan Sygall and Tracey Sharn point out in their introduction to their selection of the [best accessibility travel resources](#), physically disabled travelers need to do some planning before they go on a trip.

Before you leave: Make a checklist to identify your needs. Then search for travel providers and agents who know about and can accommodate those needs. Confirm arrangements (in writing, if possible).

- Is an onboard wheelchair provided?
- Do you need a seat with a moveable armrest? Request special seating, if required. You may need extra space to store a walker or crutches. If the seat you need is already assigned, you may, by law, request that it be reassigned to you.
- Arrange ahead of time to have your wheelchair checked as priority baggage.
- Do you need room on the plane to store a walker?
- Is help with check-in available?
- What ground transport is available to and from the airport and between airports and gates?
- Where is special parking for handicapped located? Maps of terminals can be obtained ahead of time from the airport, a travel agent or from the Internet.

Once on board, it's important to know that airlines do not generally provide services to help with eating, drinking, taking medication, or help inside a washroom.

A medical attendant may receive a reduced fare, but medical documents are needed as proof when booking your flight. Check into airlines that offer permanent medical cards (called a FREMEC). You are not required to pay extra for any disabled services; however, hookup for a respirator and stretcher travel are not services airlines must provide. Don't take anything for granted.

For international travel, service dogs require a health certificate and proof of vaccination. Some countries (including Britain) do not allow service dogs.

After arrival: Check your wheelchair or electric cart before you leave the airport. Airlines are responsible for their repair, but you must deal with any problems at the airport on arrival.

Comments from an Experienced Traveler (from blogger "Jocelyn" – who writes about global health, disability, travel, and chronic illness)

1. Pack a "survival kit" with your basic needs, information and important supplies, and always keep it in your carry-on. NEVER check this sort of baggage, and don't let porters deal with it. If I could, I'd never let the airport folks deal with my chair. (Thankfully they've only lost it once or twice!)

For myself, I have a few medications, some cash money, my address book, my medic-alert card, a letter with the names and contacts of my specialists, and the last telemetry for my pump, plus a spare of any medical supplies I need, such as catheters. I've gotten my kit down to the size of a small envelope that fits inside the slingpack I use as my purse when I travel.

2. Keep dried fruit, trail mix, granola bars, or other foods in your survival kit that will help stave off the hunger pangs when the dining car runs out of \$8 peanuts. You can't count on food always being available and convenient, and good eating habits can positively influence many chronic conditions. [The New York Times travel section has some great suggestions about travel-friendly foods.](#)

3. Carry a spare prescription for any medications you will need regularly. I tend to buy all of the meds I'll need at home, because my insurance will cover it that way.

Keep in mind, medical systems in other countries may be very different than at home, not to mention laws! I take strong pain medicine on occasion, the type that in some countries can be considered a restricted substance. As a result, I carry a paper version of the prescription in case police or medical professionals need to verify it. This also helps in case your meds are lost, stolen or damaged during your travels.

4. Let your doctor know you are going, and if you are worried about it, leave a letter in your file giving permission for your doctor to release information or consult on your case while you are gone if you request it. This might be helpful in the event of an emergency and you aren't able to consult doctors in the host country who know anything about your condition.

5. Always, always, always travel with medical insurance!

6. If you have medical equipment, like my wheelchair, familiarize yourself with its care and repair. Consider bringing a repair kit with you. I always carry a patch kit for my tires when I'm traveling.

7. Be prepared to be your own best friend during this trip: Advocate for yourself and your travel needs, and be flexible and adaptable. Don't expect everything to go as planned or even as you need it to go, but instead, think ahead and be willing to consider alternate plans. This sort of attitude goes a long way toward reducing stress and disappointment while putting you in the best frame of mind to totally enjoy yourself!

Jocelyn describes herself as a grad-student/ blogger/ girl-about-globe. She was born with a spinal cord tumor and has used a wheelchair since the age of eight, and writes about global health, disability, travel, and chronic illness. When not surfing the 'net, saving the world or reading endless journal articles, she can be found writing for her various blogs, including awaketo dream.net. Jocelyn is currently living in Melbourne, Australia but calls Vancouver, Canada home.

Summary of US Government “Traveling with a Disability” links:

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/links/tr122links.htm>

Air Travel Tips for People with Disabilities

<http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/airlinetips/>

General Tips for Traveling Abroad

(from http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html)

For detailed information about steps you can take to ensure a safe trip, see [How to Have a Safe Trip](#). Meanwhile, here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

- **Register so the State Department can better assist you in an emergency:** Register your travel plans with the State Department through a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.
- **Sign passport, and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport, and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.
- **Leave copies of itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
- **Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.
- **Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department Web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1765.html has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.
- **Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do

not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

- **Contact Consular Personnel in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs Web site at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747, if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444, if calling from overseas.

Traveling With Disabilities

Individual countries have their own standards of accessibility for disabled travelers. Some countries have nondiscrimination laws that help to protect travelers with disabilities, while other countries do not. Preparation before you go can help ensure that your planned destination will be accessible, safe and enjoyable.

Travelers with disabilities should review the Department of Transportation pamphlets *New Horizons for the Air Traveler with a Disability* and *Plane Talk: Facts for Passengers With Disabilities*. Both of these publications are available at the Department of Transportation's website <http://www.dot.gov>.

In addition, travelers with disabilities should review the information contained in the section above entitled [Planning Your Trip: Learn About the Places You Will Visit](#), consider the following tips, and discuss the trip with a physician:

- **Research in advance:** Learn about planned stops and ask questions about services available. Consider the level of health care available, as well as local transportation needs to and from the airport, luggage assistance, and whether other help will be needed to leave the airport terminal. When making reservations, inform the travel agent or carrier of your disability and the equipment you use, and, if necessary, request a wheelchair be brought to the gate upon arrival and any other assistance needed while flying and at the airport. In all cases, ask that your needs and requests be documented as part of the reservation, and take down the name of the agent. That way, if there is a problem, you may be able to quickly show that you are entitled to the service you requested.
- **Seek medical advice:** Talk to your physician about the activities you have planned and your general physical condition, any immunizations that might be needed, and medications, whether prescription or over the counter, which you might need for your trip. Carry a letter from your attending physician, describing your medical condition and any prescription medications, including the generic names of prescribed drugs.
- **Your medications:** If you take prescription medication, make sure you have enough to last the duration of the trip, including extra medicine in case you are delayed. Pack your medication in your carry-on bag, since checked baggage is occasionally lost. Always carry your prescriptions in their labeled containers, not in a pill pack.

- **Documentation of immunizations:** Take with you proper documentation of immunizations.
- **Health and Evacuation Insurance:** Make sure you have adequate health insurance coverage while abroad, including coverage of medical evacuation (not covered by most domestic policies). Note that U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.
- **Service dogs:** Some countries have restrictions on service dogs. If you intend to travel with a service dog, be sure to check on possible restrictions with the embassy or consulate of each country you will visit. (This and other country information may be found on each country's Country Specific Information at <http://travel.state.gov>). If service dogs are permitted, learn about quarantine or vaccination requirements. Find out what documents are needed, including international health certificates and rabies inoculation certificates, and if the documents need to be translated. Talk with your vet about tips for traveling with a dog, and how travel will affect the animal. You may also want to ensure that hotels will accommodate your service dog, and that there will be an adequate area for the dog to relieve itself.
- **Maintenance on equipment:** Have a maintenance check done on any equipment you will take with you, to ensure that everything is in working order before you leave. You may want to research the availability of wheelchair and medical equipment providers in the areas you plan to visit.
- **Carry written plans:** Carry with you your written itinerary and directions of where you wish to go. These can be shown to people who might be able to help you if you are lost. Another useful tool is a point-and-conversation guide.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site contains information about travel regulations and codes for air travel, assistance and accommodations, and a list of useful links at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-8/travelers-with-disabilities.aspx>
