Airline Travel

Traveling whether by car, boat, or airplane can be fun and exciting. And yet traveling can sometimes feel overwhelming with or without a disability. Preparation, time management, and knowing what you need are keys to successful travel. This document will provide a general overview to help you embark on your next adventure. Rules and regulations for airline travel change regularly, always double check with your airline and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website prior to leaving.

Helpful Hints for Air Travel

Before Getting Off the Ground
Planning your trip ahead of time is key to success. Be aware of your physical and personal care needs when deciding on time of flight, length of stay, and where you will be traveling

- **Reservations:**
  - All airlines have on-line reservation systems. Anyone can make reservations on-line except for those people who needing oxygen or ventilator support. Book departure to give yourself time for personal care and travel to airport. Be sure to indicate what type of wheelchair, power, or manual, you are using and assistance you will need with transfers. If you require assistance at the airport, notify the airline before going. The airlines will assist you through the airport and security screening.

- **Pre-Flight:**
  - Arrive at departing airport at least 2 hours before flight. It may take you a little longer to get through the airport and you do not want to be rushed.

- **Check-in with Airline**
  - Check all luggage bags; take one small carry-on bag with you.
  - Confirm seat assignments. Request Bulkhead or an Aisle seat assignment.
  - Request an aisle chair (straight-back chair with wheels) for getting onto the airplane.
  - Request assistance for bags and transfers onto airplane if needed.
Going Through Security and The Screening Process:

Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) may be used for people who are able to stand and walk unassisted. People who are not eligible for AIT screening include infants, people who use wheelchairs or anyone who cannot stand without assistance for 5-7 seconds during the screening. AIT scanning is safe. It is safe for all passengers, including children, pregnant women, and individuals with medical transplant and prostheses.

The Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) employs professionals who are referred to as Transportation Safety Officers (TSO). These people will be guiding you through the screening process, assisting with carry-on bags and performing the necessary screening process.

TSA has developed guidelines with input from disability-related groups and organizations in order to assist individuals with disabilities or medical conditions. They have trained their airport screeners how to ensure safe, dignified, and comfortable screening in special circumstances. For more detailed information about traveling with a disability, please consult the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) website as rules and regulations are updated frequently.

Advise the TSO about your level of ability such as if you are able to stand, walk a few steps, raise your arms, or lean forward in your wheelchair. You may ask for a private screening at any time.

People who are using wheelchairs (WC) will be given a physical pat-down. The TSO will search outside of your clothing. They may ask you to stand up, push-up, or lean forward. They may ask about your leg bag, if you have one.

Friends and family will have to go through the walk-through screening device. All carry-on items must go through the x-ray machine.

Service Animals

A service animal must have identification such as cards, documentation, presence of a harness, or marking on harness.

You will not be required to be separated from your service animal but are required to maintain control of the service animal unless the walk through metal detector alarms and then you both will have to go through additional separate screening.

TSO will ask permission prior to touching your service animal or its belongings.
Medications:
- The limit of one personal item and one carry on does not apply to medical supplies, equipment, mobility aids, or assistive devices required by an individual with a disability.
- All medications must have proper documentation for going through security. (Your name, medication name, dosage).
- All medications in any form and associated supplies such as syringes, sharps, infusers, inhalers, and auto-injectable pens will be allowed through the security checkpoint once they have been screened.
- If you have any type of internal medication pump (for example: insulin, baclofen, pain) advise the TSO that it cannot be removed.
- The 3-1-1 Rule of limiting liquids to 3 oz. per bag per person does not apply to medications. You should carry what you need for the flight and/or delays only. Ice packs are allowed for medications needing to be kept cold.

Medical Oxygen and Respiratory Equipment:
- Please check with your airline as each has its own policy for on board oxygen transportation and in flight oxygen usage. It is best to carry a prescription for oxygen and respiratory equipment with you.
- Notify TSO if equipment can’t be safely disconnected so they can do an alternate screening.
- Oxygen supplies and equipment go through x-ray screening or a physical inspection and an explosive trace detection screening.
- CPAP must be taken out of the carrying case and placed in a bin (recommend having in a plastic bag). Face masks and tubing can remain in the carrying case.

Medical Devices: prosthetics, casts, braces, walkers, crutches and canes
- All devices will need to be seen and touched as part of the screening process. You will not be required to remove prosthetics, braces, or casts. Walkers, crutches and canes undergo x-ray screening if they can fit through the x-ray machine.
- You may request a private screening in another area so screening isn’t conducted publicly.

External Medical Devices
- Notify TSO if you have a feeding tube, ostomy bag, urine leg bag, or other type of external device.
- You should not be asked to remove clothing or to empty them.
- You may be asked to lift pant leg to expose the location of the devise.

Computer Assistant Devices:
- Notify TSO that your devise is not a laptop computer but an augmentation device (for speech, movement, etc.).
- These devices have to undergo a visual and explosive trace detection inspection.
Check-in at the Gate

- **Flight Gate Check-in:** Arrive at your designated gate at least one hour before flight time.
  - Check in with airline personnel, confirm your seat, and request an aisle chair for boarding if needed.
  - Ask for a “Gate Check” tag. This lets the airline personnel know your wheelchair must go on your plane. Attach the Gate Check tag to your WC.
  - Ask about the “early boarding” procedure as each airline has a different procedure. Be ready to board before other passengers.

Boarding the Airplane and During the Flight:

- **Stay in your wheelchair** down the jet way to the airplane door. If you are not able to maneuver a steep jet way, airline personnel with assist you.
  - Airport personnel will be available to transfer you from your WC to an aisle chair at the door of plane. Be specific with them about how to safely transfer you. Take your seat cushion and any removable parts off your wheelchair. Store these in the overhead bin on board.
  - Remind the flight attendant that your WC needs to go under plane and make sure it has the Gate Check on it.
  - Once you are settled into your seat, remember to do weight shifts, drink plenty of water, and have a good flight! Have a plan for emptying your leg bag; ask your family or traveling companion to assist you. And if you must, use the “throw up” bag provided in the seat pocket and dispose in the airplane lavatory.
  - About 30 minutes before landing, remind the flight attendant that your wheelchair is underneath the airplane and it needs to be brought to the door of the plane after landing.

Getting off the Airplane

- **Once all other passengers have deplaned, you will be assisted off the plane.** Make sure your wheelchair is up at the door before getting on an aisle chair. Transfer to the aisle chair. Be sure you know your WC is there for you to transfer into to.
  - Check your wheelchair for any damage. If there is any damage to your WC, you must file a damage claim with the airline before departing the airport. That claim is filed at the Airline Baggage Claim office.
  - Proceed to the Baggage Claim area to retrieve your checked luggage.

Complaints or Comments about Airline Service

Consumers with concerns about air safety should contact the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) (www.faa.gov); concerns about aviation security should contact the Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) (www.tsa.gov).

The Aviation Consumer Protection Division (ACPD) (http://www.dot.gov/airconsumer/) operates a complaints handling system for consumers who experience air travel service problems. Consumers may also register complaints and comments about airline service concerning accessibility, handling of the person with a disability or any alleged discrimination.

Airline Travel