

## Keys to Successful Travel

Flying on commercial airlines for business or pleasure can be fun but it could be difficult if proper plans have not been made. Planning is essential. This holds true whether you travel with a wheelchair or not! As with anyone, something will probably go wrong at the airport or on the flight. How you deal with problems can make or break your trip. Just remember, be flexible, stay calm and have a sense of humor.

It is also important to know your rights. Did you know that your rights are protected by the Air Carriers Access Act? This lesson will help you through the process of air travel while in a wheelchair.

## Step 1: Planning Phase

Do research on your travel location. You can contact the Chamber of Commerce or the Board of Tourism in that area to see what services are available. Other sources include:

### **Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped**

347 Fifth Ave., Suite 610  
New York, New York, 10016  
(212)447-7284  
<http://www.sath.org>

### **ADA Information Line**

(800) 514-0301  
<http://www.ada.gov/infoline.htm>

### **Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association**

75-20 Astoria Blvd  
Jackson Heights, New York 11370-1177  
(800) 444-0120

### **New Mobility**

United Spinal Association  
714 Market Street, Suite 100  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
(800) 404-2898

### **Fodor's Great American Vacations for Travelers with Disabilities**

(800) 533-6478

## Other Websites

<http://www.access-able.com>

# Air Travel Tips



## Step 2: Making Reservations

Make reservations early. You can either make them yourself or have a travel agent that has worked with disability issues help you.

Ask that tickets be mailed to your home so you do not have to make an extra trip or use electronic ticketing. You must have a picture ID with you at the airport.

Be sure to tell the agent what type of assistive device you use (wheelchair, walker, etc.) and what help you need. If you change your flight, make sure the information is put on the new ticket.

Tell the agent that you are in a wheelchair and will need help with transferring.

Ask for bulkhead seating or first class (more expensive) since there is more knee room in these sections. This will make transfers & weight shifts easier. If you cannot get a bulkhead seat, ask for an aisle seat where the armrest raises. This will make your transfer easier and reduce the risk of injury to your skin.

Buy a nonstop ticket if possible. If flight transfers must be made, allow enough time during the layover to take care of any personal care needs, to get to the next gate and to board the plane.

When packing, always bring extra personal care supplies on the plane with you in case your luggage is lost or there are other delays. Bring extra IC kits, condoms, medicines etc. If your flight is longer than 5 hours, ask your doctor if you can get a Foley catheter so you will not have to do an IC at the airport

## Step 3: Arrival at the Airport

Arrive at least 1-1/2 hours before your departure time.

If possible, check your baggage at the outside ticket counter. Only check your baggage, not your chair.

Stay in your own chair until you are ready to board the plane. Do not transfer into an airport wheelchair for any reason.

Be sure to have the gate agent tag your chair with a gate check tag. Then have your chair "gate-checked". Do not get out of your chair yet...just have it tagged.

If using a train at the airport, board forwards and turn chair so it is facing the exit doors. Do not back in and do not sit in the direction the train is moving.

When the train comes to a stop, it can throw you forward in your chair. It is important that you face the exit doors to avoid getting off balance during stops.

## Step 4: Boarding Gate

If you do not have a Foley catheter, go to the bathroom before (IC, use the toilet, empty leg bag, etc.) boarding the plane. It will be a long time before you have access to a bathroom.

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Please ensure that your chair was gate tagged so it will be known that your chair needs to be brought to the gate upon the plane's arrival.

You will need to ask the attendant for an aisle chair because your chair will not fit down the aisle on most planes.

Make sure all removable parts (footrest, armrest, etc.) are labeled with your name and contact information. Tape down straps.

You will be asked to board the plane first to allow enough time to transfer and get in your seat.

Stay in **your** chair until you reach the end of the jetway in front of the plane's door.

## **When transferring into the aisle chair, make sure to:**

- Tell the airline staff how best to help you. Never assume that they know how to help you.
- Be specific with your directions. Tell them if you need spotting for a sliding board transfer or if you need a 2-man lift.
- Inform staff of any painful areas you might have so you are not injured more during the transfer.
- Remove your cushion from your chair. Bring it on the plane with you to sit on.
- Make sure all any removable parts are brought on board with you (back pack, armrests, etc.)
- Be sure that everyone begins the transfer on your count of three.
- Be sure the attendants strap you in the aisle chair before they let go and start to board. This chair is very narrow. You should bring your own straps just to be safe.

## **Step 5: You're on the Plane Now**

Once on the plane, you will need to transfer to the plane seat. If the armrest does not raise, ask the attendant to place a blanket over it to protect your skin during the transfer.

Ask the attendant to put your wheelchair cushion in the seat. The regular plane seat cushion can be removed and your wheelchair cushion can be placed on the seat. If your feet do not touch the ground, put something under them for support.

Put your seat belt on right away. If you have difficulty with balance, bring your own chest strap and wrap it around the seat for support.

Make contact with one attendant who will be on the flight with you. Get his/her name and let them know they are responsible for you. This will help them remember not to deplane without you.

Do your weight shifts during the flight at your same time intervals. You can get a skin sore in the air just like on land!

If you must empty your bladder, ask the attendant to provide privacy for you by holding up a sheet. If you have a stranger sitting next to you, you may want to let them have the option of getting up and stretching their legs for a moment.

# Air Travel Tips



## Step 6: Landing

Ask the flight attendant to call ahead about 30 minutes before you land for help getting you off the plane.

Ask that your chair be brought to the plane. Tell them you cannot use the airport chairs and that your chair was gate checked on departure.

You will be the last person off the plane. Be sure to tell the ground staff how to do your transfer. Remember, this is a new group of staff.

Do not forget your cushion.

If you are making a connecting flight, make sure they bring your chair to you to get to the next plane. This insures that your chair is making the flight with you.

Remind the attendant to load your wheelchair!

Inspect your chair and all its parts right away. If anything is wrong, tell the airline staff before leaving the airport.

**If traveling with a power chair you may face other issues. Consider the information above, but also:**

1. Tell the agent about your chair
2. Disconnect the battery from the chair
3. Note that only 1 battery will be allowed on the plane so do not bring a spare
4. Bring directions with you about how to disconnect and reconnect the battery
5. Follow above instructions for "Boarding Gate" and "You're on the Plane"
6. Take all removable parts off the chair and tape down sip and puff parts, arm straps and anything someone could accidentally pull off.
7. Follow the previous instructions for in flight and landing