

## **Planning a Trouble-Free Flight**

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Flight delays and cancellations, bumped passengers and lost luggage have reached record levels, so planning ahead has become critical for everyone. For passengers with disabilities, the effects of any of these events can be even more disastrous, so it pays to be prepared for the worst. It is also important to be educated about one's rights as a traveler with a disability should a problem arise.

While complaints to US airlines concerning damage to wheelchairs and scooters actually fell last year, you should nonetheless consider purchasing extra insurance for your mobility aid. For domestic travel, the airline is liable for an amount up to the original purchase price, so if the replacement cost is significantly higher, insurance is a good idea. For international flights, the airline is liable only for \$9.07 per pound for wheelchairs and scooters, the same as other luggage. One may be able to negotiate for higher damages, but it's safer to just buy insurance to cover replacement cost.

To help minimize damage, attach a laminated set of instructions for disassembly/reassembly to your power chair or scooter and arrive early at the gate so that the baggage handlers have enough time to safely move and stow the device. On a first come, first served basis, travelers using a folding-type wheelchair can ask to have it stowed in the cabin closet.

When booking connecting flights, allow sufficient time to cover flight delays and tardy service by airport contractors who provide wheelchair assists. Two hours between flights may seem like a long wait, but that extra time will enable the luggage or mobility device to safely make the connection with you. Flyers also have time to eat and use an accessible restroom, neither of which is available on most domestic flights.

Now that two types of oxygen concentrators are permitted onboard most US airlines, air travel for passengers requiring medical oxygen has become much easier and less expensive. However, flight delays and cancellations mean that these individuals need to carry enough extra batteries to cover even extreme delays. Travelers with diabetes also need to plan ahead and carry sufficient food onboard. Some airlines offer snacks for sale, but in a long delay, these will run out.

It's, of course, always important to pack medicines and other medical supplies in one's carryon luggage. The strict limitation on gels and liquids does not apply to prescription liquid medications and other liquids needed by persons with disabilities and medical conditions. However, one must pack such supplies separately and declare them when passing through the security checkpoint. For full details, see the Transportation Security Administration website ([www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)) or call toll-free 866-289-9673. The TSA website carries important information on the screening process for individuals with a wide range of disabilities and medical conditions.

Finally, the limit of one carry-on and one personal item (purse, briefcase or computer case) does not apply to medical supplies, equipment, mobility aids, and assistive devices carried by a person with a disability. These items are also exempt from checked baggage restrictions.