

# Traveling with a Disability

Traveling with a disability or complex health condition can be challenging, but it's not impossible. With a little research, planning, and patience, travel can be a rewarding and worthwhile experience. Here are some tips to help you prepare for your next adventure!



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[UltraRareAdvocacy.com](http://UltraRareAdvocacy.com)

# Before You Go

## Managing your medical needs

- Talk with your doctor about making any changes to your medications or treatment plan immediately before a big trip
- Make a list of your medical support needs, medications or medication restrictions, food requirements, and doctor contact information
  - If you have a medical alert bracelet, wear it
  - Consider translating this information to the local language
- Keep your medication name, its generic name, and your dose on hand, either in a card in your wallet or the notes section of your phone
- It's a good idea to carry a letter from your treating physician outlining treatment protocols in the event of an emergency, as well as a list of treatments you are required to have with you
  - This could include anything from injectable medications, to liquid medications, to specific dietary needs or supplements
- Research any vaccines or preventative medications the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) [recommends](#)<sup>1</sup> for your destination and check with your doctor to make sure these won't cause problems with your existing medications or condition
- Stay informed about travel advisories from government agencies, such as the [CDC](#)<sup>2</sup>
- Carry enough of your medication to cover you while you're away – plus a little extra. In case of an emergency, locate a pharmacy at your destination
  - Some national chain pharmacies allow you to refill a prescription in another state when traveling, but be clear on the process before transferring so you don't run into issues
  - If you receive medications through the mail from a specialty pharmacy, tell them you'll be traveling; they may be able to ship your medication to another location or provide extra
  - Call your health insurance company to verify your benefits and get an idea of the out-of-pocket costs you may incur if you need emergency healthcare services at your destination
  - Consider buying short-term travel health insurance if your plan doesn't cover you in another country
  - Make sure to bring your main insurance card and your prescription card(s) with you just in case!
- Set an alarm for the time(s) you need to take your medication and make sure to think about what time zone you'll be in; it can be harder to stick to a schedule when you're out of your routine



## Managing equipment needs

- Contact all travel vendors to ensure they can accommodate your needs prior to your arrival
- Look into renting durable medical equipment (DME) in your destination; your home health or palliative care teams likely have contacts with organizations that offer these services
- Call your cell phone service provider about international plans if you're traveling abroad
- Carry extra batteries for any specialized equipment that requires power
- Consider whether to take your own wheelchair/scooter or [rent one](#)<sup>3</sup>

## Bon voyage!

- If possible, ask a friend or family member to drive you to the airport or station – or even go with you on the trip!
- Arrive early at the airport or station to allow extra time for checking bags, going through security, and boarding

1. [cdc.gov/travel](https://www.cdc.gov/travel)

2. [cdc.gov/travel/notices](https://www.cdc.gov/travel/notices)

3. [scootaround.com/mobility-rentals](https://www.scootaround.com/mobility-rentals)

# Take Precautions to Stay Healthy!

- Consider bringing items like:
  - Hand sanitizer (make sure it fits TSA requirements if you're flying!)
  - Anti-bacterial wipes – if you're taking public transportation, you might want to wipe down your seat or food tray
  - Face mask and gloves
  - First aid kit<sup>4</sup>
- Remember: wash your hands frequently for 20 seconds, avoid touching your face, and stay hydrated and rested!<sup>4,5</sup>



4. [travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/doctor-travel-health-tips](https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/doctor-travel-health-tips)

5. [patientfirst.com/blog/8-tips-to-avoid-germs-on-airplanes](https://www.patientfirst.com/blog/8-tips-to-avoid-germs-on-airplanes)



## Map out an accessible route:

1. Type your desired destination into Google Maps
2. Type in your origin and select “directions”
3. Choose the public transportation icon
4. Select “options” and then “wheelchair accessible” under routes

*Google also has crowd-sourced accessibility information on locations — all you have to do is turn on the “accessible places” feature in settings! Learn how [here](#)<sup>6</sup>!*

## Getting There by Air

### Carefully plan flight schedules

- If possible, book direct flights to avoid the potential stress of navigating the airport to make a connection
- If you are traveling with children or individuals with a structured day, consider their medication or sleeping schedules and try to travel at less stressful or complicated times



### Know the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) rules and how TSA can help you

- Check the TSA medication [guidelines](#)<sup>7</sup> to make sure you’re prepared for the security screening process
- Print and fill out a **TSA notification card**<sup>8</sup> to alert officers about your health condition; note whether there are areas of your body that are sensitive to pat down
- Let TSA officers know if your child is able to walk through security or if they need to be carried, and find more tips from the TSA [here](#)<sup>9</sup>
- If you have any additional questions about the security screening process, call or email the [TSA Cares](#)<sup>10</sup> helpline

### Pack for success

- If you’re traveling with children:
  - Pack activities, such as a phone/tablet, coloring book, or reading material – and plenty of snacks
  - Bring a car seat approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and learn more about flying safely with children [here](#)<sup>11</sup>
- Think about how cabin pressure might affect you or your child and plan to bring helpful support items (e.g., chewing gum, pacifiers, or a straw to drink through)
- If you have hearing loss, consider bringing a notebook and pen for airline staff to write down important information for you
- Plan to carry on any necessary medication and/or medical supplies in the event you have travel delays, or your luggage is lost
  - Many airlines allow an extra carry-on to accommodate medications, medical supplies, or medical devices at no extra cost. Be sure to check your airline’s policy for details

## Call ahead

- Notify the airline at least 48 hours in advance if you'll need a wheelchair or cart assistance – it's also a good idea to ask if there is a number to call or text if you have any questions about the equipment you are given or if you are having mobility issues
- Airlines use **Special Service Request (SSR)** codes to assist passengers with disabilities
  - Make sure you contact your airline to have any relevant SSR codes added to your booking if you will need assistance at the airport; view a list of these codes [here](#)<sup>12</sup>
- If you have hearing loss, inform the airline ahead of time to ensure that you don't miss out on special announcements
- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does not allow liquid oxygen or portable oxygen tanks on airplanes; portable oxygen concentrators are allowed, but call your manufacturer to make sure it is compliant – also check with the specific airline for any additional rules

## Seek assistance the day you travel

- If you are traveling with a special needs wheelchair or stroller and you are able to carry your loved one onto the plane, ask an airline representative if you can gate check this valuable piece of equipment to ensure it is handled with care
- Talk to an airline representative at the gate about special assistance for pre-boarding
- The lack of opportunity to move and inability to lie down can be tough on muscles; during long trips get up and stretch if you can, or bring a comfort pillow or heat pack

6. [blog.google/products/maps/wheelchair-accessible-places-google-maps](https://blog.google/products/maps/wheelchair-accessible-places-google-maps)

7. [tsa.gov/blog/2014/09/05/tsa-travel-tips-traveling-medication](https://tsa.gov/blog/2014/09/05/tsa-travel-tips-traveling-medication)

8. [tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures](https://tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures)

9. [tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures/traveling-children](https://tsa.gov/travel/special-procedures/traveling-children)

10. [tsa.gov/travel/passenger-support](https://tsa.gov/travel/passenger-support)

11. [faa.gov/travelers/fly\\_children/](https://faa.gov/travelers/fly_children/)

12. [wheelchairtravel.org/air-travel/special-service-request-codes](https://wheelchairtravel.org/air-travel/special-service-request-codes)



## Know your rights

The U.S. Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) of 1986 prohibits discrimination based on disability in air travel. For example, it requires seating accommodations for passengers with disabilities, lift assistance to smaller aircrafts that don't offer jet-way boarding, provisions for passengers who are deaf, and reimbursement for

lost or damaged wheelchairs. The ACAA also includes provisions for passengers traveling with service animals and outlines a few regulations governing permitted animal types and sizes. Passengers can find tips and a list of required documentation at [transportation.gov](https://www.transportation.gov).

# Getting There by Rail or Bus

- Book travel as early as possible; depending on your destination, this may require you to schedule days or weeks in advance
- Explain any boarding assistance you may need to the reservation agent when booking
- Most rail lines in the U.S. and abroad can accommodate power and manual wheelchairs; ask whether the rail line offers a discount for wheelchair seating
- Rail lines may also allow oxygen equipment, but some have rules; make sure you talk to a representative or booking agent about any specialized equipment you travel with
- Most buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts and securement devices; however, bus restrooms are typically not large enough to accommodate assistive equipment so be prepared to wait for rest stops
  - You may want to look at the route in advance and discuss your needs with the driver so they allow time for you to get on and off the bus



## Stay Comfortably

- Determine whether your accommodation has everything you need for any specialized equipment or medication needs (like refrigeration); most hotels can make refrigerators and microwaves available
- The [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#)<sup>13</sup> requires hotels to provide accessible rooms, known as ADA rooms – book your room in advance to make sure the hotel has availability during your stay
- When deciding whether you need an ADA room, ask yourself if you need:
  - A room that's only one level
  - A room that's on the ground floor in case elevators are unavailable
  - A roll-in shower or shower chair
  - A hand or support rail
  - Wider doors
- Ask if your accommodation has back-up generators, and if you can stay on a lower-level floor
- Depending on your arrival time, think about whether you'll need to check into the hotel early and contact the front desk to see if you can arrange this
- Think about what else you might need, such as extra pillows, blankets, or garbage bags – most hotels are happy to accommodate you
- Planning to book an Airbnb? The [search feature](#)<sup>14</sup> on their website allows you to include places with features that meet your mobility needs.
- Find out whether your car rental or taxi service provides ADA support—most do
- If you're visiting a location such as a theme park or resort, ask about ADA support or programs they may have to make your experience more enjoyable

<sup>13.</sup> [ada.gov/2010\\_regs.htm](https://www.ada.gov/2010_regs.htm)

<sup>14.</sup> [airbnb.com/help/article/2000/how-can-i-search-for-accessible-listings](https://www.airbnb.com/help/article/2000/how-can-i-search-for-accessible-listings)

# Ideas to Kickstart Your Travel Planning

**America's National Parks** offer a lifetime pass for those with a permanent disability for just a \$10 processing fee. This gets you free admission to more than 2,000 recreation sites and national parks. Get the details and apply at [store.usgs.gov/access-pass](https://store.usgs.gov/access-pass).

**Disney World®** theme parks are known for accommodating visitors with disabilities and have policies and procedures in place to make sure everyone can access attractions. Check out their disability services at [disneyworld.disney.go.com/guest-services/guests-with-disabilities](https://disneyworld.disney.go.com/guest-services/guests-with-disabilities).

**Curb Free with Cory Lee** is a blog that provides information about wheelchair accessible travel including guides to many destinations. [curbfreewithcorylee.com](https://curbfreewithcorylee.com)

**accessibleGO** provides information, reviews, and bookings of accessible hotels, cruises, and destinations worldwide. Visit [accessiblego.com](https://accessiblego.com) or follow them on [facebook.com/accessiblego](https://facebook.com/accessiblego).

**We Carry Kevan** is developing services and devices designed for individuals with disabilities to go where wheelchairs cannot, with the help of friends and family. [wecarrykevan.com](https://wecarrykevan.com)



## Gear on the go

The Mighty, a digital health community, lists helpful travel gadgets curated by its members:

- Cosmetic bag for your medications
- Cane that unfolds into a seat
- Spinner suitcase for easy movement
- Portable footrest

Find the complete list [here](#).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>. [themighty.com/2017/12/travel-illness-disability-products-tips](https://themighty.com/2017/12/travel-illness-disability-products-tips)

