

Traveling With Oxygen

The thought of becoming world travelers may seem scary for people with heart and lung diseases who require oxygen therapy. But by following a few simple guidelines, you can take safe and comfortable trips to places near and far.

By Air

If you plan to fly, first ask your doctor for medical permission to travel. You and your doctor also should provide the airline with written information about your oxygen requirements. At that time, the airline's medical department will evaluate your needs to see if it can accommodate you.

Equipment varies from airline to airline, but if it can, the airline will supply oxygen and any other apparatus your doctor prescribes. Most airlines will provide oxygen for a fee ranging from \$50-\$150 for each portion of your trip. Keep in mind airlines have limited seats for passengers who need in-flight oxygen, and they also may refuse passengers who they consider unsafe to travel.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recently published a proposed rule that will allow patients who require supplemental oxygen to bring their own portable oxygen concentrators onboard flights. Under the rule, portable oxygen concentrators are deemed nonhazardous. Only one portable oxygen concentrator currently meets FAA criteria, but the new rules open the door for other portable concentrators to be reviewed and approved for in-flight use.

Before leaving home, make plans for an oxygen distributor to meet you after the plane lands because airlines don't provide oxygen services in the airport. Try to reserve a nonstop flight to avoid extra fees and the hassle of arranging for oxygen on the ground if there are stopovers.

By Land

Traveling by land is less complicated, but you should still check with your doctor before hitting the road. For example, if you're driving to a different altitude, your doctor may need to adjust your flow rate prescription. Generally, you'll need to bring enough oxygen for the trip, plus an extra 20 percent. If you'll need to stop for oxygen refills, arrange for this with oxygen distributors on your route.

When you carry oxygen in your car or motor home, take precautions to transport and store it safely. Oxygen must be kept upright, away from heat and flame. Do not store oxygen in the trunk where temperatures get hot. Also, because oxygen containers periodically release small amounts of gas, keep a window partially open regardless of the weather.

Buses have varying policies for traveling with oxygen. If you are taking a bus, check with the bus operator in advance. Most, if

The purpose of this patient education handout is to further explain or remind you about a medical condition. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, be sure to discuss them with your healthcare provider. This handout may be reproduced for distribution to patients.



not all buses are now nonsmoking, so if portable oxygen is allowed, there should not be any related safety problems.

If you are traveling by train, contact the railroad ahead of time, and let it know you use oxygen. Your equipment should not depend solely on the train's electrical power. Be sure to reserve a ticket in the nonsmoking section of the train.

By Sea

Most cruise lines will accept passengers who require oxygen, but before setting sail, ask about its supplemental oxygen policy. Some ships are equipped to provide supplemental oxygen. If yours is not, you may need to bring enough oxygen to last throughout the trip or arrange for refills at your ports of call. Your oxygen provider may be able to supply you with an oxygen conserving device for longer trips.

Some companies organize cruises especially for people with lung disease. Your local branch of the American Lung Association also may plan cruises. Visit www.lungusa.org to find out if your local office is planning an excursion. ■

Resources

Information adapted from the American Lung Association, the Transport Security Administration and the Mayo Clinic.

— compiled by Debra Yemenjian, who is on staff at ADVANCE.