

AIR TRAVEL FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CHEST, HEART & STROKE ILLNESS

Stroke conditions

When can I fly?

If your stroke has left you with any disability you are not advised to fly for 2 - 3 months. If you have had a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) you may be allowed to fly after 10 days, provided that you have made a complete recovery and you have your doctor's permission.

How can I reduce my risks when flying?

Encouraging your circulation and avoiding dehydration will give you the best protection against blood clots forming and therefore against heart attack and stroke:

- Make sure you have plenty of legroom when you book, this may mean checking in early.
- Stretch your legs and move your feet about every half hour.
- Get up regularly if you can, for short walks.
- Wear light-weight, non-restrictive clothing when you travel.
- Avoid alcohol before and during the flight as this makes you dehydrated.
- Drink plenty of fluids, preferably take your own bottle of water and have regular sips.

What else can I do to protect myself?

- If you have recently undergone surgery or have previously suffered from a deep vein thrombosis (DVT), your doctor may suggest you wear full length, white anti-embolism stockings during the flight, especially for long haul flights.
- If you are at particular risk your doctor may suggest that you take a low dose of aspirin before the flight, however you must have his/her permission.
- If you develop painful and swollen calves after a flight, you should seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Travellers' Health Line

0906 822 4100

The Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad (MASTA) have a telephone service for general enquiries and provide a tailored health brief for callers.

If you would like to speak to one of our nurses in confidence, please call the Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland Advice Line

Monday - Friday 9.30am - 12.30 and 1.30pm - 4.00pm

0845 077 6000

If you have any concerns about your health you should contact the airline medical department before travelling by air. This will allow the airline staff to help you with early boarding and ensure that you get the best in-flight care.

Who needs medical clearance to fly?

If any of the criteria below apply, you and your doctor will need to complete a Medical Information Form (MEDIF), which is available from the medical department of the airline or your travel agent.

You will need medical clearance to fly if:

1. Your fitness is in doubt as a result of:
 - a recent illness
 - a period in hospital
 - surgery
 - you have an acute or chronic condition that is unstable
2. You need any special medical provision e.g. oxygen.

Planning ahead

- You should arrive early at the airport to give you plenty of time and to try and book seats with maximum leg room.
- Avoid handling heavy luggage.
- Transport within the airport can be provided for you, if you arrange it in advance.
- Oxygen must be requested at least 48 hours in advance and preferably at the time of booking.
- Nebulisers can be used at the airline's discretion, but proper use of spacers is just as effective.
- Keep your medicines in your hand luggage and make sure you have sufficient supplies to last your holiday. This is especially important for inhalers or GTN spray that you might need to use on the journey.

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How do I arrange oxygen for a flight?

- If you use oxygen continuously and will need it during the flight you will have to let the airline know when you book your seat.
- Flow rates of 2 and 4 litres of oxygen per minute are available on most flights; however long haul flights can only provide 4 litres per minute.
- The airline will only provide an oxygen mask, so if you prefer nasal cannulae you will need to provide your own.
- Most airlines **will charge you for your oxygen** and will only provide oxygen for the flight.
- If you need oxygen on the ground you will need to provide your own for any transfer between flights.

Chest conditions

There is slightly less oxygen in an aircraft cabin than in the air normally at sea level; however most people with chest complaints have no difficulty flying. If you can walk more than 50 metres on the flat without getting breathless you will be able to fly with your doctor's permission.

Most airlines do not allow smoking on board but if it is allowed, sit well away from the smoking areas.

Remember that your sputum will become stickier in the dry plane atmosphere. Drinking plenty of non-alcoholic fluids will help loosen your sputum, which will allow you to keep your chest clear.

It is quite safe to use any of your inhalers in the pressurised cabin, keep them with you at all times. You may wish to bring a supply of antibiotics and steroids with you in the event of developing a chest infection while you are abroad.

Remain as mobile as possible throughout the flight if you are not using oxygen.

Cystic fibrosis sufferers should undertake physiotherapy during stop-overs if taking long haul flights.

When can I fly?

Tuberculosis

Infective Pulmonary TB sufferers must not fly or use any public transport.

Pneumothorax

You may be able to fly six weeks after surgical intervention and confirmation that the pneumothorax has resolved. If there was no surgical intervention a chest x-ray must confirm it has resolved before you can safely do so. Although recurrence is unlikely during flight, consequences can be serious and it might be better to look at alternatives to flying up to a year after pneumothorax occurring.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

As this is a chronic chest condition that can become unstable very quickly you should have a medical assessment prior to flying.

Chest surgery

You are not allowed to fly after major chest surgery for at least 8-10 weeks until the sternum or any ribs are healed.

Heart conditions

Generally speaking, if you can walk briskly for 100 metres on the flat without being breathless or in pain you can fly. If you suffer from stable angina with infrequent attacks you should be able to fly. It is safe to use your GTN spray in a pressurised cabin.

Pacemakers and metal heart valves

The functioning of your pacemaker or metal valve will not be affected by the airport security systems. Let the security personnel know that you have a pacemaker or metal heart valve as they may trigger the alarms of the metal detectors.

When can I fly?

Heart attack

Flying is based on each individual's abilities, which will depend on individual recovery. The general rule above about activity applies. You should be allowed to fly three to six weeks after an uncomplicated heart attack with your doctor's permission. If you are travelling to go on holiday it would be better to wait until 6 weeks to ensure you have had enough recovery time.

Heart surgery - you are not allowed to fly after major heart or chest surgery for at least 8-10 weeks until the sternum or any ribs are healed.

Angioplasty

Travel is usually permitted after 3-5 days but this needs medical clearance.