

Air travel – a guide for Lane Fox patients

The aim of this leaflet is to answer some of the questions you might have about travelling by aeroplane. The Lane Fox Unit (LFU) encourages patients to travel, but it is important to plan in advance, especially if you need oxygen or ventilation during the flight. Many airlines and airports provide useful information for people who need help breathing and/or disabled access. You should check with the airline, as different airlines have different policies.

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to one of the LFU technicians (see the back of this leaflet for contact details) or the Lane Fox Respiratory Unit Patients' Association (LFRUPA) office on **020 7188 7651**.

Please remember, the information in this leaflet should be used as a guide, and will not apply to all patients in all circumstances.

Can I travel by air?

Many patients who use ventilators at night can travel safely by air. However, for some it can be a problem. This is because the air pressure in the aircraft cabin is lower than at ground level, which means that the oxygen levels in your blood fall. For people with a respiratory condition, this can cause breathlessness and discomfort.

Please ask your LFU doctor if you have any questions or concerns about the risks associated with flying.

Do I have to tell my airline or travel company about my condition?

You **must** contact the airline or travel company if:

- your mobility is limited
- you need to use oxygen during the flight
- you use a ventilator at night.

If you need oxygen or ventilation during the flight, or have other medical conditions that might put you at risk, you and a doctor (probably your LFU physician) will need to complete a **Medical Information Form** (MEDIF). This is a document that indicates your fitness for travel.

If you need physical help, you will also need to complete an **Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice** (INCAD) form. You can complete the INCAD form on your own, as it doesn't need to be signed by a doctor.

Both of these forms are available from your airline, and may be available on the airline's website.

How can airlines and airports help me?

It is important to give airlines notice of your plans to travel.

At the airport you can get help with:

- wheelchair access
- registering at check-in
- transport to departure gate and boarding the plane.

On the aircraft you can get help with:

- stowing and retrieving baggage on the plane
- accessing the toilet during the flight.

Can I travel alone?

To travel alone, you must be able to:

- breathe without relying on supplementary oxygen or ventilation
- move from your passenger seat to a wheelchair without help
- eat and use the toilet without help.

The airline will expect you to have a travel companion if you cannot meet the above requirements.

What if I need my medical equipment?

If you think you may need to use your ventilator on the aeroplane, you will need to discuss this with your LFU doctor and with the airline in advance.

We recommend that even if you don't need medical equipment whilst you are on the aeroplane, you should carry it with you rather than checking it in with your hold luggage. Some airlines may charge for excess baggage – please check in advance.

Only dry battery packs can be used to power your ventilator during the flight. If you need tracheostomy ventilation, mains power will need to be specially arranged. Most ventilators will allow for different

voltages so that you will be able to use your machine normally when away. Please check with the LFU technicians.

What if I need oxygen during my flight?

If you unexpectedly become unwell and need oxygen during the flight, emergency oxygen is always available. However, this is an emergency supply which cannot be routinely reserved and may not be sufficient for the whole flight.

If your doctor tells you that you will need oxygen during the flight, you **must** let the airline know at the time of booking. The airline will require a **Medical Information Form** (MEDIF, see page 3), which states that you are fit to fly, although the final decision will rest with the airline.

Some airlines charge for oxygen – always check when you make your booking. Oxygen cylinders are not normally allowed on the aeroplane. **Even empty cylinders, taken to refill at your destination, must be notified to and approved by the airline in advance.** Airlines may accept liquid oxygen tanks, but you must check beforehand.

Small portable oxygen concentrators can be borrowed from LFU Technical Services (see the back of this leaflet for contact details), but you will need to give us plenty of notice in advance. We have a machine that provides continuous oxygen and a lightweight battery-powered device that provides a pulsed flow of oxygen.

What happens if I have a problem with my ventilator?

If your ventilator fails while you are away, it can either be replaced by LFU (you would be responsible for air freight costs) or you will need to make your own arrangements to repair the ventilator in the country you are visiting. The LFU technicians will be able to provide contact details for ventilator suppliers in the country that you are visiting.

Do I need to get travel insurance?

Yes, both for yourself and for your equipment. Please arrange insurance for the loss or damage of your ventilator (including air freight costs in case a replacement ventilator needs to be sent to you). You can do this through your tour operator or companies such as Thomson, who specialise in cover for people with medical conditions.

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The EHIC allows you to receive treatment if necessary during a temporary visit to European Economic Area (EEA) countries or Switzerland. The EHIC does not cover emergency repatriation (travelling back to the UK in case of medical emergency), although this is usually included in your travel insurance. Please check, and be aware that the cost of a special repatriation flight can be very substantial if not provided by your insurance. For further information contact LFU Technical Services.

Useful travelling tips

- Take enough medication in your hand luggage to last the whole trip, including a possible diversion on the outward or home bound flights.
- Get adequate sleep before you travel.
- Avoid alcohol and maintain hydration with water and soft drinks rather than too much coffee or tea.
- Make sure that you have adequate insurance cover, both for yourself and for your equipment.
- Make sure you have any equipment serviced before making your trip.
- Get your travel letter from LFU.
- Empty your humidifier before you travel.
- Arrange to borrow a backup battery from LFU if you are travelling to a remote area.

Useful organisations

British Lung Foundation

t: 0845 850 5020

w: www.lunguk.org

The British Thoracic Society

t: 020 7831 8778

w: www.brit-thoracic.org.uk

Age UK

t: 0800 169 6565

w: www.ageuk.org.uk

Freedom Insurance Services

t: 01233 446914

w: www.freedominsure.co.uk

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee

w: <http://dptac.independent.gov.uk>

Contact details

If you have any questions or would like more information about the topics covered in this leaflet, please call LFU Technical Services on **020 7188 3440**.

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748, 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

t: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

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