

Going on holiday with a lung condition



We all look forward to going on holiday and getting away from our routine. But if you're living with a lung condition, or looking after someone who is, it can take a bit more planning.

This information answers your questions: Can I travel with a lung condition? Can I fly? What about the practicalities, like insurance and medication? How do I travel if I'm on oxygen?

Our helpline is also dedicated to answering your questions. You can call them on **03000 030 555**

The government is currently advising against all but essential travel to some countries. Read the latest guidance from the Foreign Office on travelling abroad at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Our coronavirus hub has the latest guidance for people living with a lung condition: blf.org.uk/support-for-you/coronavirus

Travel outside of the UK might be affected by Brexit. You might need to do extra things that you didn't have to before. Take a look at the government website for more information at www.gov.uk/visit-europe-1-january-2021

How do I know if I can travel if I have a lung condition?

Before planning a trip, always speak to your doctor or health care professional to ask whether you are fit enough to travel as there may be some additional tests they want to carry out.

Travelling with a lung condition in the UK doesn't usually present too many issues. Lots of travel providers offer assistance to customers and you'll be more aware of what to expect. If you use oxygen, it's relatively easy for your oxygen provider to deliver your oxygen equipment to any part of the UK.

But travelling abroad can present some additional challenges, particularly if you're flying. And if you use oxygen, you will also need to plan ahead to make sure it's there when you need it.

Where can I go on holiday if I have a lung condition?

We all have different and individual preferences when it comes to booking a holiday. But you should think about things like:

- **Climate:** many people with lung conditions prefer warm climates that have salty air such as by the Mediterranean Sea. Lower oxygen levels at higher altitudes, such as in mountains, can make breathing difficulties worse.
- **Temperature:** extremes of hot and cold weather can affect your feelings of breathlessness and lead to a flare-up of your condition.
- **Terrain:** is your destination hilly or rocky? This could affect your ability to get around comfortably.
- **Transport availability:** the types of transport available at your destination.
- Whether you have any **special needs**, such as oxygen treatment or wheelchair access.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has useful guidance for planning a holiday that meets your needs at every stage. Go to www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/accessible-travel

Tips for going on holiday with a lung condition

- **Plan in advance:** if you leave things to the last minute, you could forget something crucial. Think about how far you can walk, how many stairs you can manage, how accessible the toilets will be and what transport you can use.
- **Be realistic:** places you liked in the past may not be suitable now. Pick a trip you – and your carer or travel companion - can cope with physically.
- **Be prepared:** it's important to plan ahead to make sure you have all the medication and equipment you need in advance.
- **Shop around:** different insurance companies have different policies for people with lung conditions, so find the best deal for you. Many travel agents offer holidays for people with special requirements.
- **Ask questions:** travel agencies are used to dealing with special requirements. They should be able to answer all of your queries and concerns. You can also ask other holidaymakers about their experiences on our web community (www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community). Our friendly helpline team are a great source of information. Give them a call on **03000 030 555**

Holidays in the UK with a lung condition

A holiday in the UK is generally more straightforward than travelling abroad. You'll be more aware of what to expect from accommodation and there are plenty of accessible ways to travel around the UK, even without a car.

How do I choose my accommodation?

You should check things that are important for you when choosing your holiday accommodation in the UK. For example:

- If you have mobility problems or get breathless: are there lifts or ramps that make the accommodation accessible?
- Is the accommodation easy to get to? – Is it on a bus route? Is it on a steep road?
- If you use oxygen, will the accommodation supplier allow you to use oxygen? **Don't assume that all will.**

Many accommodation search engines give you the option to search for properties with disabled access and facilities. Remember though that the facilities offered will differ from property to property. Be sure to call ahead to find out if what's offered meets your needs.

Tourism for All helps you find accessible destinations and places to stay in the UK. They charge an annual £25 membership fee. Go to www.tourismforall.org.uk

National Accessible Scheme (NAS)

The National Accessible Scheme (NAS) helps you find accommodation in England suited to your needs and allows accommodation sites to promote the facilities they offer to disabled guests and older visitors.

The NAS assesses and places accommodation providers into categories. Each category has its own logo, which is displayed by providers that have been assessed. Find out which category best suits you:

- **Older and less mobile guests** – suitable if you are able to climb a flight of stairs, but banisters or grip handles would make this easier
- **Part-time wheelchair access** – suitable if you need a wheelchair some of the time but can manage a maximum of three steps
- **Independent wheelchair user** – suitable if you depend on a wheelchair, but can transfer unaided from the wheelchair in a seated position
- **Assisted wheelchair user** - suitable if you depend on the use of a wheelchair in a seated position, but need help from a carer or a mechanical hoist to transfer
- **Access exceptional** – meets the requirements of 'independent wheelchair user' or 'assisted wheelchair user' (the categories above), while also fulfilling more demanding requirements.

You can read more about the different categories, see their logos and view accommodation in the NAS scheme on the Visit England website at www.visitengland.com/plan-your-visit/access-all/national-accessible-scheme

Camping and caravanning

If you're planning to go camping or caravanning, check access arrangements to sites. The Camping and Caravanning Club has three accessibility categories:

- no accessible facilities
- accessible to those who can move around a little, but not wheelchair accessible
- fully accessible including shower blocks and facilities.

Read more at www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/membership/your-club/dedicated-accessible-facilities

Have a look at accessible campsites in the UK at www.campsites.co.uk/search/campsites-with-disabled-facilities

You can also find out more about accessibility adapted motorhomes, and companies that can make adaptations to vehicles, at www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/helpandadvice/technicalhelp/mobility-camping

How do I get to my destination?

Travelling around the UK without a car is becoming increasingly accessible for everyone. Below, we explain some of the different ways you can get around. The key thing for all methods of transport is to get in touch with the transport provider before you travel, to make sure they offer everything you need to make your journey safe and enjoyable.

Face coverings

Across the UK, it's compulsory to wear a face covering on public transport, unless you are exempt. Take a look at our webpage and stay up to date with the guidance on face coverings at blf.org.uk/coronavirus/face-masks

Coach

Several coach companies are working towards making their coaches accessible for people with disabilities.

All National Express coaches now feature a passenger lift which makes getting on and off board easier. Drivers and coach station staff will load and off load your luggage to and from the coach if items weigh less than 20kg. Most on-board toilet facilities are now level with the coach seating.

You don't need to book in advance if you're a wheelchair user, but before you travel National Express will carry out a check to make sure they can provide everything you need for your journey. This includes making sure the stops you wish to board and alight the coach at are accessible stops, your wheelchair is compatible with the space on the coach and that the coach isn't already fully booked. It's recommended you call at least 36 hours in advance to give time to carry out these checks. The National Express Assistance Travel Team can be contacted on **03717 81 81 81**, 9am - 5pm 7 days a week. Read more at www.nationalexpress.com/en/help/accessibility

Translink, the public transport provider in Northern Ireland, operates coaches that are usually wheelchair friendly. Look at their access guide (www.translink.co.uk/usingtranslink/accessibility/accessibilityguide) for more information on their services for people with disabilities or call their contact centre on **028 9066 6630** to arrange assistance.

Traveline Cymru has useful information about accessible travel in Wales, to help you travel as comfortably and safely as possible. Take a look online at www.traveline.cymru/accessible-travel, or call **0800 464 0000** for further advice and support.

Smaller coach companies may not have the facilities you require. Phone them in advance and ask about getting on and off board, the accessibility of on-board toilets and if you can take and use oxygen on board.

Trains

Rail travel is becoming increasingly accessible to everyone. Different train companies have different policies regarding people with disabilities, so plan your route in advance and find out which companies' trains you need. All companies offer assistance to customers if pre-booked.

When you contact a train company, tell them where and when you want to travel; about your disability; how you intend to get to and from the station; whether you are travelling alone or with a companion or group, and whether you need a wheelchair. If you don't know which company to contact, get in touch with National Rail (www.nationalrail.co.uk) or call **03457 48 49 50**.

ScotRail is dedicated to helping people with reduced mobility travel comfortably and safely. They aim to provide assistance to anyone who needs help when travelling, whether this has been booked in advance or not. Find out more on the ScotRail website at www.scotrail.co.uk/plan-your-journey/accessible-travel

A Disabled Persons' Railcard is valid for 12 months and offers up to one third off a range of train tickets. If you are travelling with another adult, they will also be eligible for this discount. You can apply online at www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk or pick up an application form from your local station.

Ferries

If you plan to visit one of Britain's islands or travel to or from Northern Ireland, you can go by ferry. Many ferry companies have lifts, toilets and wheelchair facilities and some can supply wheelchairs at terminals. A few have special cabins for disabled people or offer discounts. Check with the ferry company before you book, especially if you need oxygen. Don't forget to ask for extra help from the crew before you travel.

Car

Travelling by car is one of the simplest ways to travel around the UK. But it's still a good idea to plan ahead as there may be things you need to think about. How will I cope with a long car journey? Is there parking nearby? Think about these things before you set off and make sure you plan regular stops. If you're travelling with oxygen in your car make sure you're carrying it safely and securely.

Flying

If you're travelling a long distance in the UK, you might choose to fly. Your lung condition doesn't necessarily prevent you from flying. Most people with a lung condition, even if they use oxygen, can travel on planes.

If you do fly, it's a good idea to discuss your travel plans with your doctor and to plan ahead.

Holidays abroad with a lung condition

You should always check with your doctor or health care professional to make sure you are well enough to travel before deciding where to go. It's also important you have travel insurance that covers you for your entire trip.

Where can I go on holiday abroad with a lung condition?

First, think about where you want to go. It's a good idea to think about temperature and climate. Do extremes of hot or cold weather affect your lung condition? We know that many people with lung conditions prefer warm climates, but it's worth researching and talking to others to find out your best options.

You might find it useful to talk to other people with lung conditions about their experiences in different countries. Our web community is there for you at blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community

Don't know where to start? The Lonely Planet has created a useful online resource on accessible travel across the world: shop.lonelyplanet.com/products/accessible-travel-online-resources-2019

Going on a cruise holiday

Cruise holidays can be a great option for accessibility. Many cruise companies have accessible ships, with facilities like wheelchair access, wheel-in shower, grab rails, hearing facilities and visual aids. Different cruise companies offer different levels of accessibility, so it's worth looking around to find the company (and location!) that suits you and your needs. Cruise Critic has a useful page on accessible cruise ships you might find useful to read through at www.cruisecritic.co.uk/articles.cfm?ID=105

Face coverings

Since the coronavirus pandemic, face coverings have become mandatory in shops and on public transport. Across the UK, you are exempt from wearing a face covering if you have a lung condition that makes you breathless and find wearing a face covering makes you feel too breathless. But this might not be the case in other countries abroad.

If you fall into this category, it's a good idea to check ahead for the country you are planning to visit and their guidance on face coverings. You might need something to prove your exemption, or there may not be any exemptions at all. Some travel operators may specify types of masks that should be worn on board. In some countries, face coverings are mandatory in all public places.

You can find useful information about the country you are planning to travel to on the Foreign Office website at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

How do I get there?

Ferries

Many ferry companies have accessible lifts, toilets and other facilities. They can also give priority loading and special parking spaces to vehicles with disabled passengers.

Trains

Eurostar trains have been designed to cater for passengers with special requirements. Some carriages have wheelchair access and allow oxygen containers on board.

If you are travelling further afield in Europe, or leaving Europe altogether, contact the relevant train company for its policy on travelling with oxygen.

Car

Check before you travel if you'll need a green card - a document that acts as proof of insurance and makes it easier for vehicles to move freely across borders.

The European Commission hasn't confirmed if the UK is still part of the Green Card Free Circulation Area (GCFCA), an area that covers all the European Economic Area (EEA) countries (www.gov.uk/eu-eea), as well as Andorra, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia and Switzerland. You will therefore need to carry a Green Card with you when driving in any of these countries.

Green cards are supplied by your travel insurance company and it's recommended you request one about a month before you travel.

In the UK, Blue Badges allow drivers of passengers with severe mobility problems to park close to where they need to go. The Blue Badge is a European Union (EU) wide scheme, but it's not known whether the UK Blue Badges will be accepted in EU countries now the UK has left the EU. It's thought that the Blue Badge should be recognised as normal in other EU countries, in the same way as those issued in Norway and Switzerland, but this isn't guaranteed.

Flying

Your lung condition doesn't necessarily prevent you from flying. Discuss your travel plans with your doctor. Most people with a lung condition, even if they use oxygen, can travel on planes.

If you are planning a long-haul flight and use a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, think if you might need to use your machine during the flight. Some airlines have restrictions on what machines are permitted for use on board. Others may require you to fill in a form before you travel.

If you use an electric mobility aid such as an electric wheelchair or a scooter, contact the airline in advance to let them know. Also check if your airline has any restrictions relating to equipment – this can vary between airlines.

Many airlines have a medical officer or dedicated unit for disabled passengers or those with special medical requirements. Contact the airline before you book to discuss your needs.

When you contact the airline, find out what help is available at the airport as well as on the plane. Important things to know include:

- the airline's policy on carrying and using oxygen, including portable oxygen concentrators, and medical devices such as CPAP machines or nebulisers.
- if the flight is code-sharing. This is when a flight has one airline's code and flight number but is operated by another one. You will need to check with each airline involved about their own oxygen policy.
- the exact length of the flight, and if delays are likely.
- how you need to confirm your fitness to fly.
- the facilities available at the outgoing and incoming airports. These might include assistance to get you from the airport lounge to the departure gate and on to the plane; the use of wheelchairs, and whether oxygen is available at the airport. You don't need to be a wheelchair user to get assistance at airports.

Find out more about flying with reduced mobility on the Civil Aviation Authority website at www.caa.co.uk/Passengers/PRM/Passengers-with-disabilities-and-reduced-mobility

Choosing accommodation abroad

It's very important to choose accommodation that suits your needs. Before you book, think about practical things you'll need to make your stay comfortable and enjoyable. For example:

- stair-free access to your room
- accessible toilet and shower/bath
- wide doorways to fit your wheelchair through
- plenty of power sockets (to plug in your oxygen or CPAP machine, or your nebuliser).

Before you book you should always call or email to ask what facilities are included in your room. Hotels don't normally put photos of accessible rooms on their website, so it's a good idea to ask to see photos before you make your booking, to check the room is suitable for you.

Practical issues when going away with a lung condition

Arranging travel insurance

You should arrange full travel insurance for yourself before going on holiday abroad. If you're travelling with a friend or family member, check they are fully covered too. By taking out travel insurance you can avoid huge medical bills if you are taken ill or if you have an emergency during your trip. Look into the cost of this well in advance as you may find it's too expensive or you may need to find a specialist provider.

Make sure your insurance policy covers all your medical conditions. You need to have the right insurance for your individual circumstances – **there isn't one insurance provider that is the appropriate choice for every person with a lung condition**. If you don't declare relevant medical information to your insurance provider, your policy may not be valid, leaving you facing a huge medical bill if you are taken ill while on holiday.

When you're travelling, keep your travel insurance documents in a safe place, such as your hand luggage. On reaching your accommodation, put them in a secure place like the hotel safe. It's a good idea to leave a copy of your insurance policy details with someone back at home, in case they need to contact the insurance company on your behalf.

Useful links:

- **Safer Tourism Foundation** has information about travel insurance essentials, including things to consider when choosing a provider: safertourism.org.uk/travel-tips/travel-insurance-essentials
- **Money and Pensions Advice Service** has guidance for buying travel insurance if you're over 65 or have a pre-existing medical condition. It includes a directory of contact details of providers who specialise in providing insurance for people with serious medical condition: www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/travel-insurance-for-over-65s-and-medical-conditions

European Health Insurance card (EHIC) and Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC)

The European Health Insurance card (EHIC) gives you the right to access state-provided health care while travelling in the EU.

From 1 January 2021 (post-Brexit), the EHIC is being phased out. It's being replaced with the new UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). Similarly to the EHIC, it gives you the right to access state-provided health care during a temporary stay in participating countries.

If you currently have an EHIC you can use it in the EU until the card expires. You don't need to apply for a GHIC if you have a valid EHIC. Once your EHIC has expired, you should then replace it with a GHIC.

The EHIC and GHIC are not replacements for travel insurance. Make sure you always travel with comprehensive travel insurance that meets your needs.

Read more about EHIC, GHIC and how to apply on the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic

Medication

Plan ahead

Give yourself plenty of time to organise medication for the duration of your trip. If you take prescription medication, you should discuss your trip with your GP or practice nurse at least two months before you plan to travel. You may need to ask for extra medication to cover potential delays or emergencies. If you have a rescue pack, take this away with you too. If you don't have a rescue pack, discuss with your GP whether you need emergency antibiotics.

Check what's allowed

Different countries have different rules about the types of medication they allow to be taken into the country, and the maximum quantity you can take in. Make sure you check the rules for all the countries you're going to, even if you're just passing through them.

Some prescribed medicines contain controlled drugs and may require a personal licence to take abroad. Find out more about travelling with controlled medicines at www.gov.uk/travelling-controlled-drugs

Flying with medicine

If you're flying, you should carry your medicine and any medical equipment in your hand luggage, along with a copy of your prescription. You can only carry liquids in your hand luggage if they are in containers that hold less than 100ml and are displayed in a clear re-sealable bag, less than 1 litre in volume. If you can't fit all your essential medicines into this bag, or if they're supplied in containers larger than 100ml, you may still be allowed to carry these in your hand luggage. Contact the airline and airport to let them know you need to carry additional liquids and ask for any requirements they have to allow you to do this. Don't forget about the airport you'll be making your return journey from too.

Top tips

- Check the expiry dates for your medication will be valid for the duration of your holiday.
- Some medicines need to be stored at room temperature or lower. If you're travelling somewhere hot or need advice on how to keep your medicines cool, talk to your GP or pharmacist. They might advise you to store your medicines in a thermos flask or cool bag.
- If you're given medication abroad, check whether it can be brought back into the UK. If you're in any doubt, declare the medication at customs.
- It's a good idea to travel with a copy of your prescription and a letter from your GP that confirms the details of your medicine and the health condition you need it for. As well as helping you avoid any issues at customs, it will be useful if you need medical help while you're away. You could get this information translated into the language of the country you're visiting. Your GP may charge for writing this letter, as they're not required to do this under the NHS.
- Take a photo of your passport, prescriptions and insurance policy details to keep on your phone – so you always have a copy with you!

Holidaying with oxygen

In this section, we explain the practicalities you should think about when holidaying with oxygen. Before you book a holiday, discuss your health needs with your respiratory specialist or GP.

Using oxygen on holiday in the UK

You can arrange oxygen for travelling within the UK through your oxygen provider. You will need to tell them your holiday details, including the dates and where you will stay. Give as much notice as you can - if possible - six weeks. This is most important during busy times like school holidays. But two weeks' notice is often enough at less busy times of year.

Make sure the owner of the accommodation where you plan to stay is happy to have oxygen equipment and cylinders there and get their permission to store it. You should also make sure you know how to travel safely and securely with your oxygen. Your respiratory team and oxygen provider will be able to advise you if you are unsure.

Using oxygen while travelling abroad

If you need oxygen on your holiday abroad, you'll need to arrange it at your destination before you travel. UK companies generally don't allow their equipment to be taken outside the UK. Your respiratory specialist or oxygen supplier can give you details of oxygen providers abroad. You'll need to organise and pay for this yourself.

You can buy or hire portable concentrators but make sure you have a spare battery pack or back-up cylinder. And remember your international plug adapters. Keep one in your hand luggage and carry a spare!

Using oxygen while flying

If you plan to fly, you may need a fitness-to-fly test to confirm your need for in-flight oxygen. You can read more about this on the European Lung Foundation website at www.europeanlung.org/en/lung-disease-and-information/air-travel/fit-to-fly

You may not normally need oxygen, but may need it while flying due to the higher altitude. You may also need it if you go to an area at a higher altitude than you're used to. You can test if you need oxygen at higher altitudes during the fitness-to-fly test. Your GP can help you to complete this test.

Airlines have their own rules about supplying oxygen and some charge to provide oxygen in-flight. Check with your airline before you book. Also check whether the flight is code-sharing. This is when a flight has one airline's code and flight number but is operated by another one. You will need to check with each airline involved about their own oxygen policy.

The European Lung Foundation maintains a database of airline oxygen policies for passengers at www.europeanlung.org/en/lung-disease-and-information/air-travel/airline-index

You can read more detail about oxygen therapy on our website at blf.org.uk/oxygen. Our web community is also a useful place to ask about other people's experiences of travelling with oxygen. Go to blf.org.uk/support-for-you/web-community

Our friendly helpline team can answer your questions on getting oxygen, oxygen suppliers and travelling with oxygen. Give them a call on **03000 030 555**

Useful contacts for planning your holiday

Travel in the UK

Tourism For All - national registered charity providing information about accommodation and tourism services for older people and people with disabilities:

- www.tourismforall.org.uk
- 0845 124 9971

Accommodation in the UK:

These websites may help you to find suitable accommodation around the UK:

- Visit England - www.visitengland.com/plan-your-visit/access-all#
- Visit Scotland - www.visitscotland.com/accommodation/accessible
- Visit Wales - www.visitwales.com/destinations/west-wales/access-all-areas-west-wales
- Discover Northern Ireland - www.accessibleireland.com

Going abroad

- GOV.UK - the latest travel advice by country, your rights at the airport and getting help abroad - www.gov.uk/browse/abroad/travel-abroad
- Lonely Planet – accessible travel online resource - shop.lonelyplanet.com/products/accessible-travel-online-resources-2019

Transport

Ferries

- P&O Ferries - www.poferries.com/en
- Brittany Ferries - www.brittany-ferries.co.uk (0330 159 7000)
- Stenaline - www.stenaline.co.uk (03447 707 070)

Channel Tunnel

- Eurostar - www.eurostar.com/uk-en
- Euro Tunnel - www.eurotunnel.com/uk (03443 35 35 35)

Coach

- National Express - www.nationalexpress.com/en (0371 781 8181)
- Traveline Cymru - www.traveline.cymru/accessible-travel (0800 464 0000)

Rail

- National Rail Enquiries - www.nationalrail.co.uk (03457 48 49 50)
- Translink - www.translink.co.uk (028 90 66 66 30)

Flying

- Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) - www.caa.co.uk/home - information for air travellers

Booking insurance

- Safer Tourism Foundation - safertourism.org.uk/travel-tips/travel-insurance-essentials
- Money and Pensions Advice Service - www.moneyadvice.service.org.uk/en/articles/travel-insurance-for-over-65s-and-medical-conditions

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: **03000 030 555**

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline will cost the same as a local call.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**