



Bladder and Bowel Community

Factsheet: Travelling with Confidence

It can be difficult enough to cope with on-going bladder or bowel problems or flare-ups when you're in the comfort of your own home, but what happens if you're going on holiday and in unfamiliar surroundings?

The first thing to remember is that there should be no real reason why you can't go away as long as you prepare carefully and plan everything in advance. You may be concerned and anxious about your journey, and whether you can manage in the same way on holiday as you do at home. To help you with this we've put together some tips that may help you to travel with confidence.

Think Positively!

Get out and about and enjoy life - travel abroad, stay with friends, in hotels, hostels, guest houses or campsites. Having a bladder or bowel problem, whether it's OAB, stress urinary incontinence, constipation, bowel leakage or urgency does not mean you have to stay at home.

Speak up

Many people have a health problem which affects their lifestyle. Having the courage to speak up will help you to ask for items or services which you need, and will give people the opportunity to make your trip or stay enjoyable. And remember, the first time is the hardest - you will find it easier to speak up in future.

Do not be embarrassed to mention that you have a "problem" that requires certain services or facilities. You don't need to go into details. Remember you are within your rights to ask and need to make this type of enquiry before you make your final destination choice.

Method of transport

If access to a toilet is crucial to you then you need to consider how you will get to your destination. It may sound obvious but there's no point in booking a coach journey if there's no toilet on board. The same rule applies to trains. If flying it can be helpful to try and book a seat close to the toilet, and think about a convenient flight time – if your bowels are most active in the morning, it would be wise to go for an afternoon flight and vice versa. Caravans and motorhomes are also a good option, with their home from home, on-board facilities; it can be relatively easy to remain independent. Whatever the method of travel, be careful what you eat and drink on the day; it's not worth risking an upset before you even start your journey.

Travel Insurance

Remember to sort out insurance cover before you pay for your holiday. This generally only applies to anyone with a pre-existing condition like certain cancers, Colitis, Crohns, IBD or anyone who uses an indwelling catheter. It's worth looking at insurance options and being upfront about your condition before you part with any money, as it could be difficult to get a refund if you are subsequently refused insurance on health grounds.

Doctor's letter

Ask your GP to provide or help you with the following:

- A letter outlining your medical history. Certain items are more tightly controlled in other countries than they are at home. If you carry syringes, medicines, appliances and devices, or have something like an in-planted neuromodulation system, you will need a medical letter from your doctor explaining their use to show at customs. If you're on medication it's also advisable to keep your medicine in its original packaging if travelling by air. A GP letter can also help explain your condition to a doctor in a different country if you need to get a prescription there.
- A written management plan outlining what you should do for mild, moderate and /or severe symptoms, and when you should seek medical attention.
- If you are going away for a while, ensure you are able to take with you enough of your normal medication, devices or appliances to last the duration of the trip.
- A contact number for your GP in case you need medical advice while you are away. It can be very reassuring to know that you can call your GP if you have any medical problems.

Supplies

Some manufacturers and appliance contractors have special cards that are translated into several languages that are extremely helpful if you use prescription continence or stoma appliances. Check with your supplier before you travel for more information on the types of support services they can offer you.

The best policy is to take with you a supply of all the items you will need - pads, pants, creams, wipes, etc. You may find that you can purchase items locally wherever you are going, but do not take this for granted.

If you are traveling within Ireland and the United Kingdom, you might find that it is quite possible and not too expensive to send supplies of bulky items ahead to your holiday destination or to a local health centre for collection. Many supply companies will deliver to an alternative address.

Remember that different products may need to be stored differently. Pads need to be kept dry, so ensure they are in plastic bags to prevent them being spoiled by weather or an accidental spillage. And certain medicines may need to be kept refrigerated.

Bed protection

Ask if this can be supplied where you are staying as this will ensure that it fits the mattress properly and will save you any additional weight in your luggage. Failing this, take a generously sized waterproof sheet or pad - not one which is designed for a specific size of mattress. Thin disposable draw sheets with a leak proof backing are available. Please contact us for more information on product choice and availability.

Hygiene and Laundry

As soon as you arrive you should find out what the waste disposal arrangements are. It is best to take your own "nappy sacks" (disposal bags) and a few bin liners for used pads, etc. A deodorizing spray may save any embarrassment.

Check what facilities are available with your accommodation before you book. An en-suite bathroom is the obvious choice as sharing a bathroom and toilet may restrict your access.

Find out what the laundry arrangements are - an extra charge may be required. You can probably do some of your own laundry for smaller items - a portable washing line (or just a piece of strong cord which can be stretched across a room or balcony) and a few clothes pegs can make drying a lot easier.

If items are to be sent away for washing, make sure they are clearly labelled to avoid loss.

Long journeys

You might find that it is worth changing the method you normally use to manage your continence problems, depending on the length of your journey and the type of transport. For example, you might normally use quite light pads but these may be difficult to change in an aeroplane toilet - it might be worth wearing a much heavier pad, using additional wadding cut from a roll, an all-in-one nappy style pad or pull up pant style for the journey.

On trains, buses and planes it should be possible to arrange to have a seat near to a toilet. If you are traveling for long distances by car try to note service areas beforehand and plan where you may be able to stop.

Luggage

When flying, remember to split up your supplies between different bags, in case one is lost! Also, remember to pack a supply of all the items you are likely to need during the flight and waiting periods at each end in your hand luggage. Do not be afraid to explain why you need extra luggage or cabin baggage - most companies will allow this if there is a medical reason. You will need to check this at the time of booking and you may need to supply a medical letter explaining your need.

Remember you will need a medical letter with you at airport security if you have essential medical equipment with you or your products e.g. skincare are in excess of the security cabin baggage allowance. Currently all liquid substances must be contained within a 1 litre clear, re-sealable plastic bag no larger than 8" by 7.5" (20cm by 18cm). Each liquid, gel, paste etc container must not exceed 100ml; the contents must fit comfortably within the 1 litre bag. If you need to carry more than this in your hand luggage, please seek further

advice from the airline or check the current regulations on the DirectGov website (www.direct.gov.uk). You may be able to buy skin care products at an 'air side' chemist, once through customs and you can carry more in hold luggage.

Public toilets

Disposal of pads in public toilets can be difficult because there may be no suitable bin in the toilet -especially in men's toilets. It is a good idea to always have a bag (a carrier bag for example) with your change of pads so that you can put the used pad in it and take it out of the toilets with you to the nearest bin.

Public toilets are few and far between in some countries. It is often easier to find a toilet in a hotel, bar or restaurant, or in a shopping centre.

When away from home you could consider using disabled toilet facilities as these often have more room and a washbasin in the cubicle - and they afford more privacy for changing pads, emptying leg bags, etc.

In the UK you can obtain a RADAR key for a small fee which will give you access to the 9,000 locked toilets for disabled people across the country. A Euro key for toilets for disabled people in Germany and some other European countries can also be bought from CBF Darmstadt (see Further help).

B&BC Just Can't Wait toilet card

If you don't yet have one, it may also be worth getting a Just Can't Wait toilet card from B&BC. Although it doesn't guarantee you access to all toilets, it does state the holder has a genuine medical condition that may require the urgent use of a toilet. It can be especially useful if you're travelling on a train, coach or aeroplane and there's a big queue!

Diet

It is advisable to try and stick with your usual diet whether you are travelling abroad or in the UK. If you are abroad then some extra care needs to be taken to avoid an upset stomach which may then aggravate any existing symptoms. When abroad avoid eating washed salads and fruit, don't have ice in your drinks, avoid food from street vendors and be wary of food that may have been sitting uncovered on a food counter. It may also be advisable to avoid things like shellfish, unpasteurised dairy products, re-heated food and raw or undercooked foods. Remember to buy and drink only bottled water and make sure you drink enough fluids to remain hydrated (6 – 8 glasses a day or between 1.5 – 2 litres). If you're in a very hot country you may need to increase this fluid intake to stay fully hydrated.

Finally if you develop a bowel related problem that you haven't prepared for and it is concerning you, please seek medical advice as soon as you can. You can ring your GP for advice if you've made this arrangement with him/her or visit the nearest, local medical services or hospital. If you're abroad, speak to your travel representative or your hotel manager to find out where you need to go. Above all, try not to panic as you could have picked up travellers' diarrhoea which should clear up in a day or two. Before you travel abroad, ask your GP what over the counter products you can take to combat diarrhoea or constipation. You may not need them but having them with you can add to your peace of mind.

Further Information

Disability Rights UK

12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London,
EC1V 8AF

www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Disability Rights UK was formed by the unification of RADAR, Disability Alliance, and National Centre for Independent Living. RADAR keys can be purchased.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

This website contains useful information on travelling abroad, including insurance and details of other organisations.

www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/staying-safe/health/

CBF Darmstadt

www.cbf-da.de

Visit the website to find out more about the Euro Key.

DirectGov

www.direct.gov.uk

Visit the travel and transport section to learn more about hand baggage rules and travel in the UK.

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

Visit the NHS website for full information on this helpful card.

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC/Pages/about-the-ehic.aspx

The Bladder and Bowel Community provides information and support for people with bladder and bowel issues. We publish a wide range of user friendly booklets and factsheets.

For more information please call us on 01926 357220, email help@bladderandbowel.org or write to us at The Bladder and Bowel Community, 7 The Court, Holywell Business Park, Northfield Road, Southam, CV47 0FS.

www.bladderandbowel.org

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