Going on holiday with a lung condition

- helpline: 03000 030 555
- enquiries@blf-uk.org
- www.lunguk.org

British Lung Foundation
Going on holiday with a lung condition

About this booklet

This booklet is for people who have a lung condition and their carers and families, who might be considering going on holiday either in the UK or abroad. It provides information and advice to help you to plan your trip and tips on making your holiday enjoyable and relaxing.

How do I know if I can travel?

First, ask your doctor or health care professional whether you are fit enough to travel. If you want to fly or travel abroad you may be asked to take some tests. If you can travel, your doctor or health care professional should write a letter stating this, to save time later. Some airlines may have their own forms that you and your doctor need to complete.

If you are on oxygen treatment and you live in England or Wales, contact your oxygen provider for information about how to arrange oxygen; if you live in Scotland or Northern Ireland, speak to your GP. Oxygen for use on holiday is only available free of charge for holidays in the UK, and can be arranged quite easily through your current oxygen provider or GP. More about oxygen in the UK is on p.8. For information on oxygen when travelling abroad see p.19.

Where can I holiday?

The world is your oyster. However, you may need to think about the following factors before travelling:

- Climate: many people with lung conditions prefer warm climates that have salty air. Lower oxygen levels at higher altitudes can make breathing difficulties worse.
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• Terrain: whether your destination is flat or on a hill could affect your ability to get around comfortably.
• Wheelchair access.
• Transport availability.
• Special needs, such as oxygen treatment.

Holiday tips

• 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, access to toilets and what transport you can use.
• Be realistic: places you liked in the past may not be suitable now. Pick something you and your carer can cope with physically.
• Shop around: different 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. Details of some are at the back of this booklet and on our website.
• Ask questions: travel firms are used to dealing with special requirements. They should be able to answer all of your queries and concerns.

Insurance

You should arrange full travel insurance before going away. If you are accompanied by a friend or family member, it’s also worth checking that 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 well in advance as you may find it’s too expensive or you may need to find a specialist provider.

Check that your insurance policy covers all of your medical conditions. If you don’t declare relevant medical information to your insurance firm your policy may not be valid, leaving you facing a huge medical bill if you are taken ill while on holiday. The price of an emergency air ambulance from the US east coast could cost up to £45,000 for example.

When you’re travelling, keep your insurance documents in a safe place, like your hand luggage. On reaching your destination, put them in a secure place such as the hotel safe.

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) entitles you to reduced cost – sometimes free – medical treatment if you fall ill when travelling in Europe. You must have a valid card when you travel in order to be eligible for reduced cost or free medical treatment. Pick up an application form at any Post Office or apply online at www.applyehic.org. The EHIC card is not a replacement for travel insurance and you should still take out full insurance before travelling outside the UK.

More information

The British Lung Foundation’s ‘Travel insurance’ information sheet, which comes as part of the travel pack, includes details of companies that offer policies for people with medical conditions and/or who need to use oxygen.
Holidays in the UK

How do I choose my accommodation?

Tourism for All’s National Accessible Accommodation Standard assesses all types of accommodation, including self-catering, for accessibility. It puts accommodation into four mobility categories:

- Category One – suitable for people able to climb a flight of stairs that have extra fittings to aid balance.
- Category Two – suitable for someone who needs a wheelchair some of the time but can manage a maximum of three steps.
- Category Three – suitable for people who depend on a wheelchair but who can transfer unaided to and from the wheelchair in a seated position.
- Category Four – suitable for a person who depends on the use of a wheelchair and needs help from a carer or a mechanical hoist to transfer to and from the wheelchair.

Each category has its own logo, which is displayed by accommodation providers that have been assessed. They can be viewed on Tourism for All’s website, which also lists suitable places to stay. See p.21 for contact details.

How do I get to my destination?

Coach

Several coach companies are working towards making their vehicles accessible for people with disabilities. Many coaches now feature kneeling suspension, which makes boarding and alighting easier. Most on-board toilet facilities are now level with the coach seating. If you tell the company what you need when you book, you can get help with boarding and with folding wheelchairs.

Some companies allow you to bring on board your own oxygen supply and will carry some types of collapsible battery-powered wheelchairs. A carer or family member should be on hand to help you take it apart and put it back together.

Smaller coach companies may not have the facilities you need. Telephone them in advance and ask about boarding and alighting, the accessibility of on-board toilets and whether you will be able to take and use oxygen.

Train

If you are thinking of travelling by train, get the leaflet ‘Rail Travel made Easy’, available from most railway stations. This tells you the minimum level of service you can expect across Britain’s rail network.

Different train companies have different policies regarding people with disabilities, so plan your route in advance and find out which companies’ trains you need. If you don’t know, call National Rail Enquiries on the number in the box on p.8. All rail companies offer assistance to customers who book in advance.

When contacting train companies, tell them where and when you want to travel, your disability, how you intend to get to and from the station, whether you are travelling alone, with a companion or in a group, and whether you need a wheelchair.
A Disabled Persons Railcard is valid for 12 months and offers up to a third off a range of train tickets. You may be eligible and you can ask your local station for a form.

Useful contacts

Disabled Persons Railcard
☎ 08457 48 49 50
✉ www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

National Rail Enquiries
☎ 08457 48 49 50

Ferry

Many ferry companies have lifts, toilets and wheelchair facilities; some can supply wheelchairs at terminals. A few have special cabins for disabled people and/or offer discounts. Check before you book, especially if you need oxygen. Don’t forget to ask for assistance from the crew before you travel.

Camping and caravanning

The Camping and Caravanning Club has three stages of accessibility for camping and caravan sites. These are:

- No accessible facilities;
- Accessible to people who can move around a little, but not wheelchair accessible; and
- Fully accessible including shower blocks and facilities.

A list of accessible campsites in the UK can be found at www.lovecamping.co.uk or by calling 0845 527 3362.

Holidaying in the UK with oxygen

Oxygen for travel in the UK is provided by the NHS. You just need to let your usual oxygen provider (if you live in England or Wales) or your GP (if you live in Scotland or Northern Ireland) know the details of your holiday, including the dates you are going and returning and where you will be staying, and they will arrange everything for you.

You should aim to give as much notice of your needs as you can – if possible, six weeks. This is most important during busy times like Easter as last minute arrangements can be difficult. However, two weeks’ notice is often enough the rest of the time.

You should first get permission to store oxygen cylinders and equipment from the owner of the place where you are staying. Oxygen suppliers in the UK will only provide oxygen for travel and stays within the UK, although they may have details of overseas oxygen providers that you can contact. If you are planning to travel by plane, it’s important to check your airline’s oxygen policy.

More information

The British Lung Foundation’s ‘Airline oxygen policies’ information sheet, which is included in the travel pack, outlines the policies for carriage and use of oxygen of all major airlines that fly into and out of UK airports.
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Trevor’s stress-free trip

Trevor has clocked up thousands of miles travelling across Europe in his motor home. His chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) means he must always take an oxygen cylinder with him.

“When we bought our first motor home we travelled all over Britain – around 18,000 miles,” Trevor says. His travel plans became more ambitious after he upgraded his motor home to a larger model. “This enabled us to travel all over Europe,” he explains.

Trevor’s love of travelling means he has taken lots of ferries and flights to reach destinations as diverse as Spain, Austria and Cyprus. The key to a stress-free trip, he says, is to plan ahead, especially if you need to travel with oxygen. “You have to check your airline’s policies well in advance of travelling,” he recalls, “because if you don’t, it could throw a spanner in the works at the last minute.”

Trevor’s attitude towards his lung condition is simple: “You’ve just got to learn to live with it,” he says. “I can still do many of the things I’ve always enjoyed. It might take me longer, but I just have to pace myself.”

Checklist

Planning your holiday properly will help to make it a happy and relaxing time, and should help you to avoid any hidden costs. This checklist will help you make sure you’ve got everything covered.
Checklist

Before you book

- Have you checked with your GP or health care professional that you are well enough to travel?
- Is your preferred destination suitable? Think about terrain, access and the cost of travel insurance.
- If you need oxygen, have you spoken to your GP or oxygen provider about how you will get it while you are away?
- Have you looked into your travel insurance costs? They could be a significant part of your budget. Remember to tell your travel insurer about all your pre-existing medical conditions.
- If you plan to travel by coach or ferry, have you checked that the on-board facilities are accessible?
- If you plan to travel by air, have you checked the oxygen policies of the airline you wish to travel with before you buy your tickets?

Before you travel

- Have you planned your route from door to door? Think about how far you will have to walk unaided, how many stops you might have to make and what disabled access is like at your destination. The RAC and the AA both offer free online route-planning services.
- Have you made sure you will have enough of your regular medication to see you through your trip, including extra to cover any delays?

During your holiday

- When you arrive, locate the nearest medical facility and check its opening times.
- Keep a list of your medication and your travel insurance documents in a safe place.
- If you start to feel unwell, seek medical advice quickly and make sure any medication you are given is allowed back in to the UK.

Tick or cross the box against each point

- Have you arranged emergency antibiotics, if necessary, for while you are away?
- Have you prepared a list of the medication you take, including emergency antibiotics, in case you need more during your holiday or you need to show a doctor if you’re taken ill?
- Have you completed and returned any fitness to travel documents your travel provider has requested?
- Have you thought about any allergies you have? If you are allergic to feathers, ask your accommodation provider if hypoallergenic bedding is available.
- Have you pre-booked any travel assistance you might need, for example help getting from the airport departure lounge to the boarding gate if you’re travelling by plane, or a wheelchair to get you from the station platform to the exit if you’re going by train?
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Many people with a lung condition think they can’t go abroad, but this isn’t true. As in the UK, packages differ, so shop around. Always check with your doctor or health care professional to make sure you are well enough to travel before deciding where to go, and always plan your arrangements in advance.

How do I get there?

Ferry

Many ferry companies have lifts, toilets and other facilities accessible to people with disabilities. They can offer priority loading and special parking to vehicles with disabled passengers.

Trains

Eurostar trains have been designed to cater for passengers with special needs. Some coaches have wheelchair access and allow oxygen containers on board. If you’re travelling further afield in Europe, contact the relevant European train company for its policy on travelling with oxygen.

Car

Make sure the car you are travelling in has been checked and/or serviced before you travel. Check whether your insurance company requires a green card – a document that makes it easier for vehicles to move freely across foreign borders. In the UK, Blue Badges allow drivers of passengers with severe mobility problems to park close to where they need to go. The UK has agreed informal parking arrangements with other European Union (EU) countries, so you may be able to use the Blue Badge abroad. You can find out more at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/motoringandtransport/dg_4001061](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/motoringandtransport/dg_4001061).

Checklist

Use this space to make notes or to write down any questions you might have for your GP, nurse, travel operator, travel insurer or oxygen provider.

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“Don’t be afraid. Your lungs are very resilient and mine could cope with the altitude of being at the top of a mountain. You never know what you can do until you try.”

Sharron was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2004, when she was just 40. But after living an active and healthy lifestyle, she wasn’t going to let that get in the way of her way of enjoying herself. Within six months of surgery and finishing chemotherapy, Sharron was talking to her GP about her plans to go skiing in Canada. Her doctor gave her clearance to fly after carrying out a breath test. The only downside was the travel insurance. Her usual company hiked up the premiums when Sharron told them she had lung cancer.

After some research, she found a company willing to give her an annual insurance plan for just £20 more than her husband, who has no serious medical complaints. “I found a company that had a nurse who asked me about my cancer and the medication I was on,” Sharron explains. “After a short telephone call with the nurse, they agreed to cover me for everything apart from the lung affected by the cancer.”

Flying with a lung condition

Many people believe their lung condition will prevent them from flying. This is not necessarily true. First, ask your doctor whether you can travel by plane. Most people with a lung condition can go on planes, even if they need oxygen. If you use oxygen therapy, you should ask your doctor if you might need additional oxygen on the plane.

Once your doctor has given you the go-ahead, contact individual airlines to discuss your requirements and to find out what their policy is for carrying and using oxygen on planes.

If you are planning a long-haul flight and use a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine to treat the sleep disorder obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA), you should consider whether you might need to use your machine during the flight. Some airlines have restrictions on what machines are permitted for use on board and others may require you to fill in a form before you travel. Many airlines have a medical officer or dedicated unit for disabled passengers or those with special medical needs. Contact the airline before you book to discuss your needs.

When you contact the airline, find out what assistance 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 and medical devices such as CPAP machines;
- the exact length of the flight, and whether delays are likely;
- the facilities available at the outgoing and incoming
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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; and

• how you should confirm your fitness to fly.

Holidaying abroad with oxygen

If you need oxygen for use throughout your holiday, you will need to make arrangements for the oxygen to be provided before you travel. Your home supplier will not be able to provide oxygen for you if you are travelling overseas. If you are holidaying in Europe, oxygen can be arranged through the European Health Insurance Card scheme. You will need to have a valid EHIC and you will have to use the authorised oxygen company for the country you are travelling to.

Visit [www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/countryguide/Pages/EEAcountries.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/countryguide/Pages/EEAcountries.aspx) for more details, or alternatively, contact the British Lung Foundation Helpline on 03000 030 555 or enquiries@blf-uk.org.

If you are travelling outside of Europe, you will need to contact an oxygen company that supplies the country you will be visiting. To find an oxygen provider you could contact the British consulate in the country you are travelling to or search the internet. Alternatively, contact the BLF Helpline.

Some travellers have found that hiring a portable oxygen concentrator (POC) in the UK to take abroad is an alternative to arranging oxygen supplies for the majority of their holiday. However you may still need to consider arranging a back-up supply of oxygen for emergencies. If you are travelling by plane, you should bear in mind that different airlines have different policies for using and carrying oxygen and medical devices such as POCs on board. Always check with the airline you are travelling with before you book.

More information

The British Lung Foundation’s information sheets ‘Air travel with a lung condition’ and ‘Airline oxygen policies’, which are included in the travel pack, provide more information for people with lung conditions who wish to travel by plane, and the contact details of a number of different airlines.

What if I get a chest infection or fall ill abroad?

Any chest infection should be completely treated – and you should have medical approval – before flying home. Check whether your medical insurance covers you for any problems.

Medication

Give yourself plenty of time to organise medication for the duration of your trip. You may need to ask for extra to cover potential delays or emergencies. 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. Your GP may write you a repeat prescription if your medication is due to end during your holiday. For extended trips, a maximum three months’ supply can be prescribed if
you have a stable long-term condition. Discuss with your GP whether you need emergency antibiotics.

When travelling outside the EU, also check with your GP if your medication can be obtained at your destination and whether there are any restrictions on your medication in your destination country. Alternatively, contact the British Embassy in the country you are visiting for further information. You can find the contact details for overseas embassies from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/find-an-embassy/ or by calling 0845 850 2829.

You will need a letter from your doctor confirming that you need the medication, and you should also keep a list of all the medication you take in case you need to get more during your stay. List the proper names – not just the brand names – and keep all medication in its original packaging. You should also keep a written record with you of any other medical condition you have.

When given medication abroad, check whether it can be brought back into the UK. If you are in any doubt, declare the medication at customs. Take a list of your medication and doses with you and remember to carry your medication in your hand luggage when you are travelling. A doctor’s letter is required for liquid medicines exceeding 100 millilitres that are taken into the aircraft cabin.

**Preparation**

Preparation is the key. Plan your trip in advance, think through everything you need, ask as many questions as you can of as many people as possible, then decide what’s best for you. Always tell a friend or relative where you are and when you expect to return. It’s useful to make a list before you travel and check it off as you go. A pull-out checklist is included in the middle of this booklet to help you.

**Useful contacts**

**Tourism For All**
A national registered charity providing information about accommodation and tourism services for older people and people with disabilities.

c/o Vitalise
Shap Road Industrial Estate
Shap Road
Kendal
Cumbria LA9 6NZ
Tel: 0303 303 0146
Email: info@tourismforall.org.uk
Web: www.tourismforall.org.uk

**Channel Tunnel**
**Eurostar**
Tel: 08432 186 186
Web: www.eurostar.com

**Euro Tunnel**
Tel: 08705 35 35 35
Web: www.eurotunnel.com

**National Rail Enquiries**
Tel: 08457 48 49 50
Web: www.nationalrail.co.uk
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For details of how to contact a number of UK airports, see the British Lung Foundation’s ‘Air travel with a lung condition’ information sheet that comes as part of the travel pack, or visit www.airport-guides.net.

You can also get in contact with the British Lung Foundation Helpline by calling 03000 030 555 or by emailing enquiries@blf-uk.org. Lines are open Monday to Friday 10am-6pm, and calls are charged at a local rate.

Related publications
This booklet forms part of a travel pack, which also includes:
- Air travel with a lung condition (information sheet)
- Airline oxygen policies (information sheet)
- Travel insurance (information sheet)

The pack is available to read online at www.lunguk.org or you can order it free of charge from www.blfgifts.com or by calling the BLF Helpline on 03000 030 555.

The British Lung Foundation values feedback on all its information. Let us know your views by contacting us using the details provided in this booklet.

Breathe Easy support groups
Breathe Easy groups are part of the British Lung Foundation and offer support and information for anyone with a lung condition. There are more than 230 groups throughout the UK.

Groups involve themselves in a wide range of activities, from social outings to informative talks and exercise classes.

Group members also campaign for the best possible health services in their area for people with lung disease. This means they work with their MPs and local health professionals to raise the profile of lung disease. Lung disease is not generally high on the health care agenda in the UK, and groups play a large part in campaigning to ensure lung disease is given more attention.

Many groups have members on their local health board. Through working in partnership, they aim to ensure the best services are offered to all those who need it.

To contact the BLF, to find out where your nearest Breathe Easy group is, or to find a pen pal, please get in touch using the contact details below.

British Lung Foundation
73-75 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7ER

t: 020 7688 5555
e: breathe.easy@blf-uk.org
w: www.lunguk.org
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British Lung Foundation

Whether it’s mild asthma or lung cancer, the British Lung Foundation is here for everyone affected by lung disease.

This is what we do:

• We support people affected by lung disease through the individual challenges they will face. Support is the focus of many of our activities, including Breathe Easy, our nationwide support network.

• We help people to understand their condition. We do this by providing comprehensive and clear information on paper, on the web and on the telephone.

• And we work for positive change in lung health. We do this by campaigning, raising awareness and funding world-class research.

British Lung Foundation
73-75 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7ER

• **helpline**: 03000 030 555
• **e**: enquiries@blf-uk.org
• **w**: www.lunguk.org

Registered charity of England and Wales – no.326730
Charity registered in Scotland – no. SC 038415