

The 7 A's of Accessible Travel – Airlines *tip sheet*

Information and tips to **empower your journey** living with a neuromuscular condition.



This tip sheet provides lived experience guidance to help you plan air travel. It provides general information only and is not intended to replace individual, clinical or professional advice.

The 7 A's of Accessible Travel



Think of these as your travel planning guide.

1. Advance Planning
2. **Airlines – you are here**
3. Accessible Transport
4. Accommodation
5. Activities
6. Assistance
7. Advice

Flying is often one of the most stressful parts of travel, especially when you're navigating accessibility needs. The right information – and a few hard-won tips from peers – can make a big difference.

Before travel



Independent travel

Airlines may assess whether you can safely travel on your own or whether a support person is required.

To travel independently, you must be able to:

- Manage personal care
- Take medication
- Eat and drink without support
- Transfer between mobility aids and seats using approved methods
- Understand safety instructions
- Communicate with airline staff

Airline special assistance team

Before booking or at time of booking, notify the airline of any special assistance needs. You may need to provide additional information on request. It's also a good idea to contact the airline in the days leading up to your travel to confirm all arrangements are in place.

Medical clearance

Some airlines may require a medical clearance form or letter before travel if your condition could be affected by flying.

Travelling with medical or mobility equipment

Advise the airline's special assistance team early that you use a wheelchair or mobility aid. Some wheelchairs are too large or heavy for certain aircraft, so check aircraft size and equipment limits before booking.

If you use a powerchair, confirm the battery type and whether airline approval is required, as some batteries are classified as dangerous goods. Other devices with batteries (e.g. hoists, BIPAP) also require clearance to fly. Always travel with a compliance certificate provided by the equipment's manufacturer. It's also recommended to travel with a record of your mobility equipment's width, height, length and weight.



Concession discounts

Some airlines offer discounted fares for people with disability or their carers. You will typically need to liaise directly with the airline to receive these discounts, rather than book online.



[Qantas Carer Concession Card program](#) in partnership with People With Disability Australia



[Virgin Disability Assistant Concession Fare](#)

Baggage allowance

Passengers with disability are generally able to check in medical or life dependant equipment and up to two mobility aids, in addition to airline baggage allowances, at no extra cost. Depending on the type of aircraft, there may be size and weight limitations for the equipment.

Seating needs and transfers

It can be helpful to understand how boarding and transfers will be managed on your flight to help avoid surprises on the day. People with mobility needs will typically board first and disembark last. Passengers cannot remain in their personal wheelchair during the flight. Airlines use different transfer methods, including aisle chairs, slide boards and hoists such as the Eagle Lift.

You may also wish to discuss seating needs, such as an aisle seat, extra space, or seating close to carers or travelling companions. Be aware that some seats have restrictions, such as emergency exit rows. You may also want to discuss any seating supports available, such as a torso harness, chest belt or extender belt.



Before you get to the airport



Know how to disassemble and reassemble your wheelchair

You'll need to hand it over to airport staff before boarding. Many travellers create written instructions that can be attached to the chair, outlining how to put it into push/manual mode, alongside a note highlighting the importance of handling the equipment with care. Consider which delicate or removable parts can travel with you as carry-on luggage once the wheelchair is disassembled, such as the joystick or controller.

Make sure you know how to make your wheelchair as small as possible, so it fits in the container. It's also a good idea to have bubble wrap ready to protect delicate parts.

Know how to make simple repairs

Some wheelchair manufacturers provide small repair kits that can be useful for on-the-go fixes.

Plan for comfort on board

People often bring their wheelchair seat cushion or extra back or arm supports on board the aircraft to improve comfort during the flight. ROHO cushions will be affected by cabin air pressure changes, so you may need to adjust inflation once the plane is at cruising altitude or on arrival. Some people with a neuromuscular condition (including children) choose to bring a car seat for comfort, so just ensure it is pre-approved.

Plan ahead for toileting needs

Aircraft bathrooms are small and may not be accessible for everyone. Some people adjust fluid intake or timing based on flight length and personal needs. Others use pads, external catheters or bottles/bedpans and ask staff to hold up blankets for privacy.

Use a tracker

Placing a tracker, such as an AirTag, on your wheelchair or mobility aid can provide peace of mind during your flight.



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At the airport



Arrive earlier than usual

With additional access needs, extra time gives staff more flexibility if issues arise.

Ask for gate-checking of your wheelchair

Some airlines prefer wheelchair transfers at check-in rather than at the aircraft door. If this isn't suitable, a medical certificate stating that you require your wheelchair until boarding may help. Any loose items or attachments should be removed and taken on board. After your wheelchair has been checked, an aisle chair is typically provided to help you navigate the aircraft cabin.

Take photos of your wheelchair

Take photos – from multiple angles – before handing your wheelchair over to baggage staff. Doing this while waiting at the gate avoids delays during boarding and provides a record of your wheelchair's condition.



On board

First on, last off

You'll usually board before other passengers and disembark after everyone else has exited. While this can mean spending extra time on the aircraft, it also gives staff more time to assist with transfers safely.

Cabin crew support

Cabin crew can assist you to locate food and drinks, open packaging and retrieve carry-on items during the flight. However, they cannot:

- Help you eat or drink
- Provide personal care
- Administer medication

If you require support with these activities, you will need to travel with a carer or support person.



Remind staff about your wheelchair or mobility equipment

During the flight, remind cabin crew that your wheelchair or mobility equipment should be returned to the aircraft door wherever possible, rather than being sent directly to the baggage carousel.



On arrival

Check your wheelchair before leaving the terminal

If you notice any damage, report it immediately at the airline's service desk so it can be logged and addressed. Airlines may be able to arrange a temporary replacement or repairs, but this usually only happens if the issue is logged immediately.

Advocating for yourself



Flying with a neuromuscular condition often requires extra planning and patience. Every airport, airline and destination can be different, so don't be afraid to ask questions, repeat your needs and advocate for yourself. The more information you have before you travel, the more confident you'll feel when it's time to take off.

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