Make Traveling With COPD a Breeze!

by RUSSELL WINWOOD

How to Prepare When Traveling With COPD

Does the thought of traveling send a cold shiver up your spine or make you break out in a cold sweat? If that sounds familiar, you're not alone.

For many chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients, traveling is not something they commonly do, as it can be far too daunting. Take a deep breath and read the tips I use to make travel less stressful.

The Reality of Traveling With COPD

I travel quite often in my own country, and usually overseas once a year — without a doubt it’s a stressful time. Most people can pack up their bags, lock up the house, and off they go traveling.

For COPD patients, it's not so simple, and much preparation has to be done. The less mobile you are, the more difficult it becomes and the less likely you are to travel.

I know there are times after I've traveled that I look back and think, “Could I really be bothered doing that again?” But, as hard it is for those with COPD, we can't abandon the idea because it's too hard.

Tips for Planning a Trip With COPD

If you are planning a holiday, my advice would be to look at holidays that will be less stressful — only you can decide what that would be.

From my experience, air travel can be the most stressful, as organizing oxygen onboard can be very difficult with some airlines. Do some research, and ask questions in forums with other patients to see what airlines make travel a little easier.

I've certainly found that some airlines are more accommodating than others about my oxygen requirements.

Climate, pollution, cigarette smoke and local transport are just some of the other factors you need to consider in making your decision.

If you’re traveling for work or a family event, your destination is out of your control. You will need to try and minimize situations that will negatively impact your disease.

If you take regular trips to the same destination, take notes on what will make your trip easy next time.

Don't Prepare to Fail

Preparation is everything when traveling. The better you prepare, the more enjoyable your break will be.

Plan for important factors — such as medication, oxygen (if required) and emergency contacts — while you're away. I always take double my medication just in case something gets lost.

Planning for Air Travel With COPD

If you're traveling by air, make sure you keep your medication in your carry-on luggage, as suitcases can get lost. It's a good idea to have a letter from your doctor outlining your disease and the medication you require.

If you require oxygen, you need to research the oxygen policies of the mode of transport you'll be traveling on and whether they supply equipment, or you have to bring your own. Remember to carry plenty of battery power for your portable oxygen concentrator as well as your power adapters.

Making a list of emergency contacts that includes doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies at your destination can reduce stress if there's an emergency.

Read more about flying with COPD.

Don't Forget About Air Quality

Are you planning to be in a city that has little restriction on cigarette smoking? It's a good idea to do some research, find out what you're up against and plan ahead.

I will always find out the smoking policies of restaurants and bars before deciding on where I will go.

You may be going somewhere that pollution is an issue; if that's the case maybe try and plan to do your sightseeing at times of the day when pollution is at its lowest. Many radio and television stations give out daily pollution forecasts.

Planning for Transportation

Public transport can vary from city to city, and an unreliable public transport system can turn a good day out into a stressful one. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the transport options and consider which will be less likely to affect your breathing.

I try to avoid using underground transport, such as subways, as I find the fumes in these areas will rapidly affect my breathing. Allow plenty of time to arrive well before your transport leaves so you don't get anxious.

If you are booking guided tours while you're away, make sure you inform the tour operator of any requirements you may need. Giving them time to prepare is your best chance for an enjoyable experience.

Calling your transport provider before you travel is a great idea as well. Ask them questions about accessibility and whether they can offer you any extra assistance when you use their service. If you're traveling alone and have several suitcases this can be especially helpful.

Travel Insurance for COPD: Is It Worth It?

Travel insurance can be a tricky road to navigate, as policies can differ from country to country. Some insurers will not cover you for pre-existing conditions, especially lung disease.

However, many will cover you for all other medical emergencies that may arise — it's better having some insurance coverage than none at all. Make sure you shop around as prices can vary substantially.

Also check your bank’s policies, as some credit cards have a health insurance policy attached. There may be a minimum spend associated with the credit card.

Other Things to Consider When Traveling With COPD

A big mistake many patients make when they are on holiday is overeating, as that's a popular pastime when taking a break. Remember that overeating can lead to breathlessness and bring on an exacerbation that could have been avoided.

Make sure you pack appropriate clothing that will keep you either warm or cool, depending on your destination — COPD and weather problems are a bad combination.

Preparation and COPD

Preparation is everything for COPD patients, not only in everyday life but especially when traveling. My advice is to leave no stone unturned — the more you are prepared, the better time you'll have on your journey.

If you’re traveling by air, don't forget to bring all the relevant documentation that you will need. Making a checklist using some of the tips I've shared is the first task to do before planning any travel.

Tick all the boxes and leave yourself plenty of time, so you don't become anxious, and you'll be heading in the right direction of having some quality downtime.