



Factsheet

Flying for people with limited mobility

Everyone loves the idea of going on holiday, but for people with limited mobility, holidays that involve flying can seem difficult and daunting. This need not be the case though as airlines have a legal obligation under UK and EU law to support passengers with limited mobility to travel with them.

Below are a few handy tips on planning a flight for people with limited mobility.

Taking your wheelchair on the plane

Unfortunately, there is no aircraft yet built that can enable a wheelchair to be secured in the cabin with a passenger inside it. Wheelchairs must be stored in the hold of most planes so it's important you speak to your airline to find out what help they provide with getting your equipment onto the plane. Some newer aircraft may have a specially built stowage in the cabin where you can stow a collapsible wheelchair.

Boarding the plane

Airports have staff called service providers who can assist with handling people and lifting them and their equipment on and off aeroplanes. It is important to contact your airline in advance so that they can ensure the airport service providers will be ready to meet you at the airport.

Travel chairs, harnesses and body supports

A number of travel systems that offer appropriate support during flights are available. The following are examples of some of the most popular:

- The Burnett body support is a large cushion filled with polystyrene beads designed to offer adapted seating support. It is moulded to the shape of the person's body and can be used in conjunction with a three- or five-point harness. A pump is attached and the air evacuated, enabling the cushion to mould perfectly to the shape of the person seated in it, offering comfort and support where it is most needed. When air is reintroduced, the cushion returns to its normal shape.
- The Crelling harness (model 27) is approved for aircraft use. It is a full five-point harness designed to offer additional support in aircraft seats. It is available in three sizes.
- MERU TravelChairs are postural seat inserts that support children who cannot sit independently. They are suitable for children up to the age of 12 and are used by several airlines.

Have a go before you fly!

Try b4u fly (<http://tryb4ufly.co.uk>) is a Surrey-based service that provides children, young people and adults with the chance to trial specially designed aircraft seating support. They also offer seating support assessments and a hire service so you can try out the systems and practise using them if the airline you are using does not hold them in stock.

Choosing the right airline

It is important to choose an airline that has proper support in place for your mobility needs. Some airlines are much better than others at providing assistance. Below is some feedback we have received from our network about the provision some airlines have made, which may be of use if you are trying to decide which airline to go for and whether your preferred airline meets your needs. It is also worth noting that some airlines will charge you an additional fee if you need two or three seats together, so it is always best to check with your airline before you book.



- **Virgin Atlantic**

Virgin Atlantic offers support in the form of the Burnett body support and Crelling harnesses, which passengers can book in advance. Virgin will also allow disabled customers to use their own disability supports on board as long as they fit safely in the aircraft seats.

For more information visit: www.virgin-atlantic.com.

- **British Airways**

British Airways offers assistance with boarding the plane and has some additional seating support available, such as travel chairs. BA does not charge extra for carrying medical equipment and supplies, so you can pack these separately from your other luggage. However, it is best to carry with you a doctor's supporting letter if you have a large quantity of medical equipment. For more information visit:

www.britishairways.com.

- **Monarch Airlines**

Monarch currently provides a travel chair and a Crelling harness, enabling passengers who cannot sit independently to travel safely and comfortably during their flight. For more information visit:

www.monarch.co.uk.

If you are ever in doubt, ask your airline directly whether they can provide the particular support you need, and try to book well in advance.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) advice for plane travel

The EHRC gives the following advice to disabled and less mobile passengers:

1. Before you fly

Consider the kind of assistance you may need, and check the airline's safety rules.

2. Booking your flight

Always tell your airline, travel agent or tour operator at least 48 hours in advance if you need special assistance.

3. Arriving at the airport

Find out in advance about the layout and facilities at your chosen airport.

If you have asked for assistance, they should be expecting you when you arrive.

4. At the check-in desk

Remember to confirm any pre-booked assistance when you check in.

Seats with extra legroom are always in demand, so if you need one, explain why.

5. Moving through the airport

Airports must provide free assistance to get disabled and less mobile passengers to their flight.

6. Boarding the flight

Disabled and less mobile passengers will usually be called for boarding first.

All staff who deal with customers must have disability awareness training.

7. On board

Airlines must make all reasonable efforts to arrange suitable seating for you.

Up to two items of mobility equipment can be carried on the aircraft.



8. Leaving the plane

Unless you're in a hurry, you will usually be the last to leave as it's easier to move around in an empty cabin.

Getting help

The Civil Aviation Authority (www.caa.co.uk) deals with complaints about UK airlines and airports in England, Scotland and Wales. They can give you free advice on how to get the right service.

Further Information

- To read more about flying with a disability, visit our blog: www.changingmindschanginglives.com.
- For general information on accessibility when travelling by air, have a read of Trailblazers' 'Up In The Air' report on air travel and accessibility: www.mdctrailblazers.org.
- For the EHRC's step-by-step guide on 'Your Right To Fly – What You Need To Know': www.equalityhumanrights.com
- For more detailed information about your rights: www.gov.uk.

This factsheet was written by Jill Davies and Ana Reid. We are very grateful to Geraldine Lundy, Passenger Accessibility Manager at Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd, for all her help in developing this guide. April 2014