

Traveling with Oxygen Fact Sheet

When traveling, people with lung disease have extra considerations to take into account. People who regularly need supplemental oxygen, such as those with COPD, need to plan for mobility -- how to get from one place to another between refills. However, when traveling by plane, even people with lung disease who don't necessarily use oxygen at home may require in-flight oxygen because the air pressure in an airplane cabin is lower during flight than on the ground. Regardless, patients should be sure to talk with their physician before traveling.

When Traveling by Air

Well in advance of traveling, talk with your physician -- you need your doctor's approval to travel. You and your doctor should also provide the airline with information about your need for oxygen. The airline's medical department will then evaluate your needs to see if they can accommodate you. If they can, the airline will supply the oxygen and other apparatus that your doctor deems necessary. Equipment may vary from airline to airline. Keep in mind that airlines have limited seats for passengers that need in-flight oxygen. Airlines may also refuse passengers that they consider unsafe to travel.

Passengers cannot use their own oxygen cylinders and equipment. However, passengers may be able to take empty cylinders and equipment as part of their baggage. Check with different airlines as their charges for supplemental oxygen and equipment storage vary.

Remember to also make plans for when you're on the ground -- airlines do not provide oxygen at the airport. Try to get a non-stop or direct flight to avoid extra fees and the hassle of arranging for oxygen on the ground if there are stopovers. Oxygen distributors should be able to provide this service.

When Traveling by Land

There are fewer restrictions when traveling by land. However you should still talk with your doctor. Let your doctor know about the altitudes that you'll be traveling to -- s/he may need to alter your flow rate prescription if you are going to a very different altitude.

You will also need to arrange for oxygen refills in advance.

BY CAR: When traveling by your own car or motor home, you have the freedom to carry your own portable oxygen equipment and to arrange for refills along the way. But remember to transport and store oxygen safely. The oxygen must be kept upright, away from heat and flame. Do not store oxygen in the trunk where it can get very hot. Also, because oxygen containers release small amounts of gas periodically, keep a window partially open, regardless of the weather.

BY BUS: Since the travel-with-oxygen policy varies by bus line, check with the bus operator in advance. Buses should all be non-smoking now, so if portable oxygen is allowed there should not be a problem.

BY RAIL: Similarly, there are no set policies for traveling with oxygen by rail. Contact the railroad in advance to notify them of your need and to check their specifications on the equipment you can bring aboard. You will need to sit in the no smoking section.

Generally, on Amtrak, you will need to bring enough oxygen for the trip plus an additional 20%. The equipment should also not depend solely on the train's provided electrical power.

When Traveling by Sea

Check with the cruise line for their supplemental oxygen policy. Some ships may be able to provide supplemental oxygen; otherwise you will need to bring enough oxygen to last throughout the trip or arrange for refills at ports of call. Your oxygen supplier may also be able to provide you with an oxygen conserving device for longer trips.

Some companies, such as MedicalTravel.org and Cruise Holidays, organize cruises especially for people with lung disease. Your local Lung Association may also have plans for a cruise -- [click here](#) to find out if your local is planning one.

International Travel

In general, oxygen is widely available in Europe and Japan. There are now more suppliers that can provide oxygen in many other countries as well. Be sure to have the right electrical conversion adapters for your respiratory equipment. Liquid oxygen adapters with metric threads may also be needed.