

TRAVELLING WITH PARKINSON'S

A person with Parkinson's (PD) may face challenges while travelling due to changing mobility, energy levels, and special concerns relating to medication. The following points can help you plan for a safe and memorable travel experience.

Planning

- Make a detailed list of what you need to take with you, well in advance of your travels.
- Strategies for feeling well and managing stress:
 - Plan your trip within a realistic assessment of your stamina and overall health.
 - Whenever possible, travel with a companion, and avoid busy travel times.
 - Be prepared for the stress of travelling to possibly make symptoms temporarily worse.
 - Plan for coping with the possibility of having a medication "off" period at a critical time, such as in a customs line, airline check-in, or in similarly busy places.
 - Rest on the day before, and the day after your trip.
 - Remember that some last-minute changes or travel interruptions are beyond your control.
- See your doctor before departing:
 - Ask your doctor for a letter explaining that you have PD (and other conditions, if applicable), along with medications, potential complications, and their contact information.
 - Ask your doctor for the name of another doctor in the area where you are travelling, if possible.
 - Let your doctor's office know when and where you are going, and for how long.
 - If possible, provide your doctor's office with the phone number of a local pharmacy at your destination in case you require a refill, or your medications are lost or damaged.
- Specialized travel planning:
 - Consider planning your trip with a travel agent who specializes in working with people with disabilities. Schedule extra time into your plans.
 - Research the applicable airline and hotel policies and regulations regarding accommodations for people with disabilities.
- Special items to prepare:
 - Consider creating and carrying a card with the following wording: "I have Parkinson's disease. Sometimes, I have difficulty speaking and moving. Please allow me extra time. In case of an emergency, contact..."
 - Consider taking a travel dictionary to learn how to ask for medical and other help, and how to describe PD symptoms in another language.
 - Take written confirmation of your travel plans and itinerary, and leave a copy with a friend or family member at home.

Medication and Staying Well

- Bring extra medication. Many doctors advise travelling with two complete packages of essential medication, in case of emergency. Ask your doctor for recommendations.
- Take your medications, vitamins, and supplements in their original bottles for easier identification.
- Keep medications with you in your carry-on baggage. Do not check them.
- Be aware of changes in temperature. Many medications require a cool storage place, and many must be kept out of direct sunlight.

- Never store medication in the glove box of a car, as this area can be very warm.
- Maintain your medication schedule as closely as possible. Use a watch with an alarm, or an alarmed pill box, or set a timer on your phone, particularly if you are crossing time zones.
- Talk to your doctor about how you can adjust your medication schedule if necessary.
- Long hours of travel can upset your digestive system. Drink plenty of fluids, eat fibre-rich foods, and include some physical activity each day.
- Keep snacks and bottled water with you at all times.

Getting the Help you Need

- Never hesitate to make your needs known.
- Be specific and clear when describing PD. Many service providers will not understand the medical terms relating to PD, its symptoms, and your particular needs.
- Consider requesting wheelchair services and luggage lifts at airports or other terminals.
- Ask for front seats on planes and buses to avoid crowded aisles, and to have maximum leg room. Balance this request with proximity to washrooms.

Travel Insurance

- Ensure you have adequate travel insurance to cover emergencies.
- Be sure your insurance covers pre-existing conditions and medications, and is valid in the countries to which you are travelling.
- Stow the insurance certificate in your carry-on bag, and put a duplicate in another piece of luggage.

Packing for Comfort

- Pack light and use a belt bag or backpack, so that you have both hands free whenever possible.
- Have valid photo identification in an easily accessible pocket or compartment.
- Use luggage with easy-rolling castors, large, comfortable handles, and easy-to-use zippers.
- Carry all contact addresses and emergency numbers in an accessible compartment in your carry-on bag. If you have a travel companion, make a duplicate record for them to carry.
- Carry a water bottle with you whenever possible. Be sure to drink plenty of water when travelling.
- Wear shoes that easily slip off and on for airport security.
- Bring a U-shaped pillow to support your neck.

Hotels

- Consider requesting service for people with disabilities in hotels and other tourist facilities.
- Most hotels have some modified rooms, usually referred to as *accessible rooms*. Consider booking these and call ahead to find out what features are available, such as grab bars in bathrooms, and roll-in showers. Remember that “accessible” does not mean the same thing everywhere.
- When making reservations, request a room on the ground floor, or near an elevator.

Air Travel

- Request a non-stop flight, and an aisle seat near the bathroom.
- Check in as many bags as possible to reduce the amount you carry. The limit of one carry-on bag and one personal bag does not apply to medical supplies and assistive devices.
- Assistive devices such as canes and wheelchairs are permitted onboard.
- A certificate written by your doctor for a wheelchair or scooter may be required.
- People in wheelchairs can request private checkpoint screenings.
- With documentation of medical need and proper labelling, syringes are permitted onboard.
- Use airport shuttles and take advantage of early boarding options.
- Arrive at the airport well in advance.
- Get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.
- Sit as comfortably and as straight as possible.
- Avoid alcohol; although it may help you relax on a plane, it can lead to dehydration, dizziness when standing, and sore muscles if you fall asleep in an awkward position.

Exercise during flights

Ankle Circles

- Lift feet off the floor. Draw circles with the toes, simultaneously moving one foot clockwise and the other foot counter-clockwise. Reverse.
- Rotate in each direction for 15 seconds.
- Repeat if desired.

Foot Pumps

- Start with both heels on the floor, and point toes upward as high as you can.
- Put both feet flat on the floor, then lift heels high, keeping the balls of your feet on the floor.
- Repeat in a continuous motion, and in 30 second intervals.

Knee Lifts

- Lift your leg with knee bent, while contracting your thigh muscles. Alternate legs.
- Repeat ten times for each leg.

Shoulder Roll

- Hunch your shoulders and roll them forward, then up, back, and down, using a gentle circular motion.

Neck Roll

- With shoulders relaxed, drop ear to shoulder and gently roll neck to opposite shoulder forward and back, looking down, holding each position about five seconds.
- Repeat five times.

Knee to Chest

- Bend forward slightly. Clasp hands around the left knee, and hug it towards your chest.
- Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Keeping hands around the knee, slowly let it down.
- Alternate legs, and repeat ten times.

Forward Flex

- With both feet on the floor, and stomach held in, slowly bend forward, and walk your hands down the front of your legs toward your ankles.
- Hold stretch for 15 seconds, and slowly sit back up.

Travel by Car

- Many PD medications can cause drowsiness. Plan to drive during your best “on” times.
- Do not underestimate the demands of a long drive. Break your trip into shorter distances with frequent stops, or share the driving with someone else.
- Take your disability parking permit with you when you travel.

Travel by Bus or Train

- Wheelchair lifts are generally available for entrances and exists on both buses and trains. Call in advance to check if this is the case.
- Seats can often be removed to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Try to get an aisle seat near the exit.
- In trains, get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.

Cruises

- Ocean liners offer scooters for rent during cruises.
- Ask in advance whether any ports of call require a license for a motorized wheelchair.