

## **FLYING WITH YOUR OWN WHEELCHAIR**

*"How to maximize your journey & minimize your anxiety"*



When you need to use a wheelchair or scooter to get around, the thought of flying in a commercial airliner can understandably cause a lot of anxiety and sometimes even fear. The worry list is endless, things like a possible damage to your personal equipment, the possibility of personal injury during transfers to and from an aisle chair, late delivery of your personal wheelchair, aircraft seats not being very comfortable or the lack of enough leg room in the aircraft.

Despite all this, however, there are some simple things you may do to minimize the chance of things going wrong when you travel by air, so that you can be almost assured of a safe, incident-free journey.

### **Tips for booking a flight**



As per E.U. Regulation 1107/2006 on "The rights of disabled persons & persons with reduced mobility when traveling by air", **at the time of booking of your airline ticket or at least 48 hours before the published departure time of the flight, you must notify the Airline / Travel Agent / Tour Operator that you will need special assistance and also what type of special assistance you will need. The air carrier will in turn inform the relevant airport authority.**

If at all possible, always prefer to book a direct flight, or at least minimize the number of layovers. Fewer aircraft changes minimize the risk of something going wrong. If you must schedule a connecting flight, make sure you allow a large buffer of time between flights, so that any irregularities, such as a delay in delivering your wheelchair, will not cause you to miss your flight.

### **Special Assistance Codes for Disabled Persons & Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRM)**



Disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility (PRM) are strongly encouraged to use the right assistance code for their personal needs when traveling by air.

By stating the correct Assistance Code to the Airline / Travel Agent / Tour Operator at the time of booking of an airline ticket, you will ensure that the "special assistance" to be provided will be as per your particular needs.

Please find below a list with some of the most common “Special Assistance Codes” used, which should be entered accordingly in your ticket reservation profile:

<b>BLIND</b>	Blind passenger. Specify if accompanied by service animal.
<b>DEAF</b>	Deaf passenger. Specify if accompanied by service animal.
<b>DPNA</b>	Disabled passengers with intellectual or developmental disability needing assistance. Specify details.
<b>WCHR</b>	Passenger can ascend/descend steps and make own way to/from cabin seat but who requires wheelchair for distance to/from aircraft. When service animal is accompanying passenger, specify the type of animal in free text.
<b>WCHS</b>	Passenger cannot ascend/descend steps, but is able to make own way to/from cabin seat, requires wheelchair to/from the aircraft. When service animal is accompanying passenger, specify the type of animal in free text.
<b>WCHC</b>	Passenger completely immobile, required wheelchair to/from aircraft and must be carried to/from cabin seat. When service animal is accompanying passenger, specify the type of animal in free text.
<b>WCBD</b>	Passenger travelling with dry-cell operated wheelchair.
<b>WCBW</b>	Passenger travelling with wet-cell operated wheelchair.
<b>WCMP</b>	Passenger travelling with manual powered wheelchair.
<b>WCOB</b>	Passenger is requesting an on-board wheelchair.

### **Re-confirm all your special assistance needs with the airline/s**

**It is recommended that you call the airline/airlines a few days before any flight to re-confirm your particular “special assistance” needs and ensure that they are properly recorded in the airline’s computer system**, for example “*I am traveling in a motorized wheelchair*”. If this is a multiple trip with different airlines, ensure you perform this verification call with all airlines.

**During Check-In formalities on the date of your flight, re-confirm once again with the airline representative assisting you, that all your “special assistance needs” are recorded in the airline’s computer system**, for example: “*I want to use my own wheelchair until the entrance of the aircraft, where two “special assistance” agents will be needed to lift me to an aisle chair and then transfer me and lift me into my seat on the aircraft. Upon my arrival at my airport of destination, my wheelchair needs to be delivered at the aircraft*” where the same transfer needs are required by two “special assistance” agents.

**As an extra precaution, during the flight, about half an hour before landing, ask one of the flight attendants to notify the pilot of your “special assistance” needs, for example: “*My wheelchair needs to be brought to the aircraft and an aisle chair will be required for my transfers which will need to be made by two persons.*” The pilot will duly inform the airport of destination and relay your needs to them so that the “special assistance” staff is fully prepared for your arrival.**

## Make your wheelchair “flight proof”



If you own more than one wheelchair, it may be better not to take your “primary” wheelchair, which may be a more expensive piece of equipment.

It is also a good idea for your wheelchair to look clean when you fly, since a clean wheelchair is likely to be treated with more respect by airport personnel during transfers.

If you own a battery powered wheelchair, before your planned journey, it is a good idea to make sure that no electrical wires are hanging loose from your wheelchair. If you do find loose wires, make sure you tighten them securely to the wheelchair frame with wire ties. By leaving wires hanging loose, you will increase the risk that they get ripped off during handling.

Another good idea for safeguarding your battery operated wheelchair, is to attach to the wheelchair a laminated sheet of paper containing instructions for how to switch from “manual” to “automatic operation”.

For all types of wheelchairs, you may also attach to your wheelchair a note asking handlers to “be careful when handling the wheelchair”. If the native language of the country of destination is not English, you could provide translated instructions, since this will personalize your wheelchair and encourage wheelchair handlers to be more careful.

For owners of battery operated wheelchairs, before you fly be sure you know the type of batteries that your wheelchair uses. Wet-cell batteries need to be disconnected to protect the terminals against electrical shorting because they are considered spillable. On the other hand, dry-cell and gel-cell batteries are considered non-spillable, have fewer requirements for handling and don’t need to be disconnected.

During Check-In or before boarding the aircraft, you may perform a last check on your wheelchair. At this point, with an aim of protecting vital removable wheelchair parts from damage or loss, and while taking into consideration the respective airline’s restrictions on the weight and size of carry-on luggage, it is a good idea to take off from the wheelchair and take into the aircraft cabin with you all removable parts such as footrests, armrests, headrest, seat cushion and the electronic control.

## Medical Supplies & Equipment



It is a good practice to maintain a checklist of all the medical supplies and pieces of equipment you need on a daily basis. This list will allow you to pack days-ahead of your departure date, in a relaxed manner.

It is also recommended that you carry with you at all times all essentials, always taking into consideration the relevant security regulations and the respective airline’s restrictions on the weight and size of carry-on luggage.

## Personal Comfort & Hygiene

It is always best to sit on your own wheelchair cushion while flying, to avoid pressure sores which can develop from sitting on an aircraft seat for too long. If your wheelchair cushion tends to inflate at higher altitudes due to the change in air pressure, take some air out after take-off and re-inflate as required when you reach your destination.

If you don't have full control over emptying your bladder and bowels, and if using the on-board bathrooms is not an option for you for any reason, as a precaution you may eat less than you normally do during the two days before you fly and avoid any foods that you know may irritate your intestines.

If you are using an external condom catheter and a leg bag for urine drainage, monitor your leg bag frequently during flight to make sure it doesn't get too full. You may also carry a bottle with you on the aircraft to capture the urine when you empty your leg bag. If you wish to be completely sure that a potential bladder or bowel accident is contained, you may choose to wear special incontinence briefs for the duration of your journey.

## Going through airport security



Expect that both you and your wheelchair will be thoroughly inspected by Security Screening staff at the airport, so it is important to keep in mind that you will need to allow for extra time for security checks when planning your arrival time at the airport.

Any bags you are carrying must be taken off and placed on the Security Screening machine to be X-rayed.

## Transfers with an Aisle Chair / Boarding Chair



An "aisle chair", sometimes also referred to as a "boarding chair", is a specially designed narrow wheelchair which is used for passengers who are unable to walk on their own to reach their seat when boarding and deplaning an aircraft.

If you need an "aisle chair" to reach your seat, make sure you request this service when making airline reservations and again when Checking-In, so that the equipment will be available at your departure gate and arrival gate at the airport of destination. If you also need assistance with transferring between the aisle chair and your wheelchair or the airplane seat, make sure you remember to ask that two "special assistance" agents are available for these transfers.

Aisle chairs are narrow due to the fact that they need to fit in the aisles of the aircraft, and for this reason they could be uncomfortable. Also be aware that some aisle chairs do not recline at all. If your body does not have very good balance, you may still feel uncomfortable despite the seat belts available on aisle chairs. In view of this, feel free to bring your own set of Velcro straps to provide additional security for your legs and upper body. This will also minimize the risk of any accidents.

To avoid any accidents, be sure to inform the "special assistance" staff who perform the transfers as to "how" you would like to be lifted, to ensure that you are not injured. **Don't assume that they know the best way to transfer you, because every disabled person is different. It is always best for the strongest person to lift you from the back. Your safety must always come first!**



If you have no upper body balance, let the “special assistance” staff know accordingly. This is especially important right after you have been lifted to be transferred to an aisle chair and before your seat belts have been tightened, because the handlers need to give you extra support to prevent you from falling off the aisle chair.

### **Sitting safely in your airplane seat**

If you have no upper body balance, a single seat belt around your waist in the aircraft seat can leave you feeling insecure, particularly during landing when it could be hard for you to prevent yourself from falling forward. A good remedy would be for you to bring an extra Velcro strap that is long enough to go around your chest and the back of your seat, to keep your upper body more secure.

If you feel this is necessary, you may also carry with you another strap to tie your feet to the bottom of your seat. This will prevent your legs from kicking forward due to leg spasms caused by severe vibrations during take-off and landing or turbulence during the flight. If you are traveling alone, you may ask the “special assistance” staff to help you put these additional straps in place.

### **Be prepared when you fly**



**Being well prepared is always the best ally in reducing the stress and anxiety that a person with a disability or a person with reduced mobility may feel when traveling with their own wheelchair. It is best not to assume that the airline and “special assistance” personnel know how to handle your own personalized assistance needs. Take control over your own situation by clearly conveying your needs when you book your flight and again when you check in.**

Even though, since the enforcement of E.U. Regulation 1107/2006 (“The rights of disabled persons & persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air”), both airline, airport personnel and Special Assistance Staff are better trained to accommodate the needs of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility, don’t let that prevent you from being fully prepared yourself.

**Only you are in a position to know exactly what you need and only you can take full responsibility for your particular requirements and safety.**

**Being well prepared allows you to enjoy all the benefits of flying and travel.**

**Have a great flight!**