

Your Rights to Fly: What You Need to Know

A step-by-step guide for disabled
and less mobile air passengers



**Equality and
Human Rights**
Commission

EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
www.equalityhumanrights.com

GUIDANCE

Your Rights to Fly: What You Need to Know

A step-by-step guide for disabled
and less mobile passengers

About this publication

What is the aim of this publication?

This publication aims to provide an overview of the rights of disabled and less mobile air passengers and explain what they can do to ensure that their journey runs smoothly from start to finish.

Who is it for?

This guide is designed for disabled and less mobile air passengers.

What is inside?

In summary, this guide offers advice for air passengers

- When arranging and preparing for a flight
- When arriving at an airport and checking in
- When moving through an airport
- When boarding a flight, whilst onboard and when leaving the plane.
- Details on where to find further information and useful contacts

When was it published?

This guide was first published in 2008. It was revised in 2011 and again in July 2014.

Why has the Commission produced it?

The Equality and Human Rights Commission promotes and enforces the laws that protect our rights to fairness, dignity and respect.

What formats are available?

This guide is available from www.equalityhumanrights.com. For information on accessing a Commission publication in an alternative format, please contact: correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com.

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Introduction

Under European law, if you are disabled or have difficulty moving around you can receive assistance when you fly to and from Europe.

You do not need to be permanently or physically disabled to benefit from this service. In fact, anyone who has difficulty moving around, for example because of their disability, age or a temporary injury, can receive help when they fly.

This short guide gives you an overview of your rights and explains what you can do to ensure your journey runs smoothly from start to finish. Many airports now include advice to disabled travellers on their websites. This information should provide more detail about access to the airport you intend to use, and should be read alongside this guide.

To find out more, please visit www.equalityhumanrights.com/airtravel or see page 13 of this guide for more contact details.

You may notice the term 'persons with reduced mobility' used at some airlines and airports across Great Britain. This is the legal term used to define airline passengers who find it difficult to move around easily because of factors such as disability, injury or age.

Step 1 | Before you travel

Before you travel, consider the kind of assistance you may need.

Airports, airlines, tour operators and travel agents must provide clear and easy to use information and must make information accessible to customers in other formats such as large print and audio. Websites should also be accessible for all users.

Airline safety

Airline safety rules must always be available to the public and can be found on airline websites or by contacting them directly.

These rules, which may vary from airline to airline, may state that anyone unable to fasten their seatbelt, leave their seat and reach an emergency exit unaided should be accompanied. This also applies to passengers who need help with breathing, feeding, assistance in the toilet, or taking medication.

On smaller aircraft, there may be limitations on the number of disabled passengers who can travel for safety reasons.

Airlines can only refuse a booking from a disabled or less mobile passenger if accepting it would break safety rules or if the size of the aircraft or its doors makes boarding or carriage physically impossible. If a booking is refused, the airline or its agent must inform you of the reasons why.

Step 2 | Booking your flight

When you book, always tell your airline, travel agent or tour operator if you need assistance when you travel.

For example, if you have an electrically powered wheelchair, check before flying that the battery is a dry cell type. It may be helpful to put a note on your wheelchair explaining how it works as it is likely it will travel in the hold with the luggage when you are transferred to an airport wheelchair.

Assistance should be requested no later than 48 hours in advance but if shorter notice or no notice at all is given, reasonable efforts must still be made to assist you.

You may be able to book your flight by telephone, face-to-face or online.

When booking online, it is sometimes not possible to explain your assistance needs and you may need to contact the airline, tour operator or your agent separately. You should not be charged extra for this service.

Note that booking staff may not automatically ask whether you need help so you may have to prompt them and ensure they clearly understand what your needs are for every step of the journey.

Ask for pre-booked assistance to be confirmed in writing on the ticket or itinerary. You can use this to let staff at airports know what assistance has been agreed, and this will help you to make a complaint if you do not receive the correct assistance.

Medical clearance

You are likely to be asked to provide medical clearance if your health could be affected when you fly. Passengers with a permanent and stable disability do not require this. You should not be asked for medical clearance to prove you need help.

If it is necessary for you to carry liquid medicines or medical equipment in your hand luggage, please remember to bring a letter from your doctor so you are not prevented from bringing these through the security area. Your doctor may charge you for this letter.

Step 3 | Arriving at the airport

You can find out more about layout and facilities at your chosen airport in advance via their website or by contacting them directly.

Airports must have help points. You can find these at terminal entrances, at railway or bus interchanges and in car parks.

If you have requested assistance, this information will have been passed onto the airport. On arrival, you should go to a designated help point or to the check-in desk at the time specified by your airline.

If you arrive by public transport, the station or transport operator should be able to provide you with advice on getting to and from a terminal, and you will often find designated help points close by.

For security reasons, you cannot park outside terminals. Therefore, please use the nearest car park or drop-off point. Airport car parks should have spaces for Blue Badge holders and a help point - airports may also provide spaces for passengers requiring special assistance who are not Blue Badge holders.

Pedestrian access should be well signed and fully accessible to all users.

Step 4 | Checking in

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

If you check in electronically in advance, you should be able to confirm the assistance you require and select the most appropriate seat.

If you check in at a self-service point, staff should be available to help you.

If you use a wheelchair, you may be allowed to stay in your own chair to the gate depending upon the type or severity of your disability and if your wheelchair can be loaded at the gate. If not, your wheelchair will be checked in and you will be transferred to an airport wheelchair. If you are provided with an attendant driven wheelchair then staff must provide you with assistance to get around the airport and go to the toilet.

Security checks are made on all passengers and baggage, including mobility equipment and mobility aids.

Security staff should carry out searches sensitively. Make sure they are aware of your needs.

Mobility equipment

You can take up to two items of mobility equipment with you. Airlines may not be required to compensate you in full if this equipment is lost or damaged so consider separate insurance cover.

Always check beforehand if there are any safety or security restrictions on the medical equipment you take with you. There may be restrictions on equipment such as oxygen cylinders, and certain types of wheelchair batteries.

Make sure your electric wheelchair is fully charged before you fly and that the power to the chair is disconnected before loading, so your batteries are not flat when you arrive.

Let staff know if you require your mobility equipment to be brought to you before disembarking and what your transfer requirements are.

Step 5 | Moving through the airport

Airports are responsible for providing assistance to disabled and less mobile passengers to get you to your flight. This includes, for example, checking in and going through security. You must not be charged for this assistance.

The services and facilities at an airport are covered by the Equality Act 2010. Signage should be clear, and there should be additional services or facilities such as accessible toilets, textphones, low-level telephones and induction loops.

Reserved seating areas should be available for disabled passengers and passengers who have difficulty moving around. These should be clearly sign-posted and will often be close to a help desk, information screens and accessible toilets.

Airports must provide accessible flight information. Visual displays should be designed and positioned in a way that can be read easily by people with visual impairments and those in wheelchairs.

Some airports no longer make public announcements. If you can't read flight information on the screens provided, please inform staff so they can keep you informed.

Getting to the toilet in airports

Airport or airline staff should help you to move to the toilet before, during and after your flight but are not required to provide personal assistance inside the toilets.

Step 6 | Boarding the flight

Disabled and less mobile passengers who have difficulty moving around will normally be called for boarding first. If you are unable to climb stairs, the way you board will depend on the situation and equipment used.

If the aircraft is alongside the terminal building and an air-bridge is used, this provides level access into the cabin.

If you cannot walk to your seat you will need to transfer to a wheelchair used for this purpose.

You may need to transfer by bus. These buses should have a low floor to allow easy boarding.

Many airports will use scissor lifts (often known as 'ambulifts') which allow level access to the aircraft door.

When boarding smaller aircraft, it is more common for stair climbers or boarding chairs to be used.

Staff training

All staff dealing with the travelling public at airports or on planes must have disability awareness training. Some staff, such as those employed to provide direct assistance, will have more specialist training. However, this does not mean that staff will be experts in all types of disability or in using mobility equipment. They will need you to tell them how they can best meet your needs.

Step 7 | On board

Moving around on an aircraft can be difficult because of limited space.

Wheelchairs cannot always be fixed securely in the cabin so will usually be stored in the hold.

Airlines are required to make all reasonable efforts to provide appropriate seating for your needs, such as ensuring the person travelling with you is seated next to you.

On board information

Newer aircraft are more likely to have better access and to include features such as improved signage, lighting and materials, and some wide-bodied aircraft have accessible toilets.

Airlines must communicate essential flight information accessibly to all passengers throughout your journey. If you need a personal briefing in a particular format, tell the cabin crew.

Your seat

If you are allocated a seat before you fly, airlines should allow you to pre-book the most appropriate seat. If seats are allocated at check-in, staff will advise you on the most appropriate seat, such as one that allows you to move around, has moveable arm rests or extra foot space.

For safety reasons, if you have difficulty moving around, you cannot sit in seats where you may obstruct access to emergency equipment or impede the emergency evacuation of the aircraft. This includes any rows next to a door or emergency exit, which are often the seats with extra 'legroom'.

Seats with extra legroom are always in demand. If you require such a seat you should advise the airline as soon as possible before you travel.

Occasionally a disabled or less mobile passenger may need more than one seat to meet their needs. Airlines will generally charge for extra seats but may offer a discount.

Dogs

Recognised assistance or guide dogs are allowed in the cabin without charge on approved routes. Larger dogs will normally sit on the floor whilst lighter dogs can be carried in the owner's lap. Due to space constraints, it may not be possible for a large dog to sit at the owner's feet so a second seat may be required. The airline may charge a fee for this.

However, under the UK Pet Travel Scheme, dogs are only allowed to enter the UK on certain routes so remember to check the route you wish to fly beforehand. See www.gov.uk/pet-travel-travelling-with-assistance-dogs for further details.

Step 8 | Leaving the plane

If you require assistance, you will usually be the last to leave as it is easier to move around in an empty cabin. However, if you need to leave quickly, for example to catch another flight or to get to the toilet, you should request this when you book your flight.

Wherever possible, your mobility equipment should be made available to you shortly after leaving the aircraft. If equipment is lost or damaged, the airport is legally required to provide a temporary replacement, though this will not necessarily be on a like-for-like basis.

Airport staff must help you to collect your baggage, complete immigration and customs procedures, reach connecting flights or go to the next part of your journey. This includes airport car parks.

Further information

The air travel industry is working hard to meet its obligations under the law. Please visit www.caa.co.uk/default.aspx?catid=2800&pagetype=90 to learn more.

It is important to tell your airline, airport, booking agent or flight operator straight away if you have any problems receiving help. If you are not satisfied with the response or you wish to complain about a breach of the law, the Civil Aviation Authority can advise you on how to do this.

If you are based in Northern Ireland, please contact the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI).

Contact details for relevant organisations can be found on our website at www.equalityhumanrights.com/airtravel.

The time limit for making a claim to a court is six months, less one day, starting from the date the discrimination happened. However, it is important to note that the courts are currently unable to award compensation for discrimination occurring on passenger flights.

More information

Please note this guidance only applies to complaints related to disability or reduced mobility. If you have any other air travel complaints, please contact the **Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)**.

Phone 020 7453 6888 (Mon. to Fri., 09.00 to 17.00)
Fax 020 7453 6754
Email passengercomplaints@caa.co.uk
Post Passenger Advice and Complaints Team
Civil Aviation Authority
4th Floor, CAA House
45-59 Kingsway
London WC2B 6TE

You can find more information about your rights on our website at www.equalityhumanrights.com/airtravel.

This publication and related equality and human rights resources are available from the Commission's website: www.equalityhumanrights.com.

For advice, information or guidance on equality, discrimination or human rights issues, please contact the **Equality Advisory and Support Service**, a free and independent service.

Website www.equalityadvisoryservice.com
Phone 0808 800 0082 (Mon. to Fri. 09:00–20:00; Sat. 10:00–14:00)
Textphone 0808 800 0084 (Mon. to Fri. 09:00–20:00; Sat. 10:00–14:00)
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