

TRAVELING WITH ALS

FACT SHEET | AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS SOCIETY OF CANADA | SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCLÉROSE LATÉRALE AMYOTROPHIQUE

TIPS, TRICKS AND TACTICS FOR TRAVELING WITH ALS

Traveling can be stressful and difficult for anyone, but when you have a physical disability, that is even truer. This information is meant as a guideline or source of ideas to make traveling easier and more enjoyable. Traveling can still be a rewarding experience for people with ALS. A little time spent planning will make all the difference.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR WHEELCHAIR OR SCOOTER

Before you leave, take the necessary precautions to ensure your wheelchair is in good working condition. Have it serviced and get the contact information for the nearest service centre at your destination. Pack a toolkit in case of mechanical problems.

When checking in, you'll be asked to go to the baggage section to get your wheelchair tagged. Make sure to get a "gate delivery" tag for your wheelchair. Don't board the plane until you see the tag attached to your wheelchair - without it, the wheelchair may not be at the gate when you get off the plane or in proper condition when you get it out of baggage.

Help the airline staff by labeling your wheelchair. Wet cell batteries must be separated and put into a leak proof container, so if your wheelchair uses either dry cell or gel cell, label it with that information. Include a label that clearly says "must remain upright" and instructions for transporting your wheelchair, such as "unlock brakes before moving".

If parts are removable, remove them. The basket and cushion can be lost in transit and the joystick easily damaged. The wheelchair cushion may also be more comfortable than the airline seat, especially if it is hard for you to reposition yourself while seated, so take it with you.

KNOW YOUR DESTINATION

"Wheelchair accessible" is not a firmly defined term. For some hotels it simply means no steps inside the room and two grab bars at the toilet. It may not refer to a roll-in shower or a bed or toilet that is the right height. Call the hotel and get specific details.

Accessible bathrooms are not provided everywhere. If you need a

wheelchair accessible bathroom or help from a friend, ask to use the private bathroom. Employee bathrooms are likely to be larger and more private.

Inquire about wheelchair accessible vans or taxis to transport you and your party. Find out if public transit is wheelchair accessible - this will decrease the cost of getting around.

Have the contact information of local ALS societies in case of problems. They may be able to help you find agencies or the assistance you need, such as a clinic used to working with people with ALS. Also pack a list of doctors' names, emergency contacts, medicine and a medical equipment user guide to aid anyone else if they need to assist with your equipment.

EATING AWAY FROM HOME

Not all airplanes or trains will have straws available, so it's best to bring your own.

On airplanes, liquids are viewed suspiciously. If you require liquid food, especially if it's home made, get a note from your doctor explaining your situation. Some airlines, such as Air Canada, will provide specially prepared meals on 24 hours notice.

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KNOW TRANSPORTATION REGULATIONS

It is important to know what is allowed on the plane, train or ship. All air, cruise and rail lines have different rules, so ask questions when booking your ticket. Be warned that travel agencies may not have the most up-to-date information. It's best to call a hospitality provider directly to make arrangements. Some battery-powered items, such as laptops and ventilators, or liquids, such as medicine or pre-made liquid food, are now considered threats to security. It's recommended that you bring information verifying your condition to prove these items are medical necessities. Ensure you inform your carrier about your special needs at least 48 hours before leaving.

<http://www.aircanada.com/en/travelinfo/before/specialneeds/wheelchair.html>

http://www.aircanada.com/en/travelinfo/before/specialneeds/medic_approval.html

SPECIAL SEATING

Some airlines provide special seating, at no extra charge, for customers with special needs who require a personal attendant to accompany them. The policies and requirements for these attendants differ between airlines. Most will require an advance notice and a medical form to be filled out by your physician. Visit the airline's websites or phone to inquire about their policies.

Air Canada - Special Seating:

<http://www.aircanada.com/en/travelinfo/before/specialneeds/specialseating.html>

WestJet - One Person One Fare program

<http://www.westjet.com/guest/en/travelInfo/specialNeeds/onePersonOneFare.shtml>

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Request notification of changes between the day you book airline seats or hotel accommodations and your date of departure. You may have to alter plans or make further arrangements.

Purchase travel insurance in case items are lost or damaged.

Carry your living will in case of emergencies. Have it, and any other pertinent documents, translated if necessary.

MORE INFORMATION

The following web sites offer additional information and services for people who are mobility impaired:

<http://www.wheelchairescapes.com/>

<http://www.access-able.com/>

<http://emerginghorizons.com/>

<http://www.allaccesstravel.com/index.html>

<http://www.epic-enabled.com/>

<http://www.disabilitytravel.com/>

<http://www.travelintalk.net/>