Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation

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The mission of the Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation is to accelerate the development of new treatments and ultimately a cure for pulmonary fibrosis. Until this goal is achieved, the PFF is committed to advancing improved care of patients with PF and providing unequaled support and education resources for patients, caregivers, family members, and health care providers.

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What else should I know when I travel by air?

If your condition has worsened or you feel ill on the day of travel, you should talk to your doctor about your travel plans. Talk to your doctor to see if you should bring extra medication on your trip. Many people are more active while traveling. You may find that you are unable to participate in some activities that require a good deal of effort. Consider this possibility when planning your trip.

Can I travel to high elevations?

It is important that you discuss your travel plans with your healthcare provider. If your destination is at an elevation above sea level, you may suffer from breathlessness with small degrees of exertion or even while resting. Your healthcare provider may advise you to not travel to destinations at high elevation.

What about traveling by car?

Contact your oxygen supplier to tell them about your travel plans and your oxygen needs at your destination. The 12V DC outlet power source charger in your vehicle can charge your portable oxygen concentrator.

My doctor said I need oxygen at my destination. How can I obtain oxygen while away from home?

Your doctor may determine that your portable oxygen concentrator is sufficient for your travel needs while away from home. If you need an additional oxygen delivery device while away from home, your oxygen supplier may be able to coordinate with an oxygen supplier at your destination to provide the device(s) you need. Be sure to plan ahead of time.

Resources for traveling with supplemental oxygen:

American Airlines
1.800.433.7300

Delta Airlines
1.800.221.1212

Southwest
1.800.I.FLY.SWA (1.800.435.9792)

United Airlines
1.800.UNITED.1 (1.800.864.8331)

what do I need to know about traveling with supplemental oxygen?

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TRAVELING WITH SUPPLEMENTAL OXYGEN

Many people with pulmonary fibrosis (PF) can safely travel by air, but for some, air travel can be dangerous. The atmosphere is made of 20% oxygen and 80% nitrogen whether you are at sea level or living high up in the mountains. At higher elevations, there is simply less air (the atmospheric pressure is lower), so there is less oxygen for you to breathe.

Since commercial airplane cabins are usually pressurized to an elevation equivalent to about 1,500-2,500 meters (about 5,000-8,000 feet), you will be breathing less oxygen while in-flight.

If you have PF, it is important that you discuss your travel plans with your health care provider weeks or months before planned travel. After completing any required medical tests, your healthcare provider will determine whether you need oxygen while in-flight. You will then need enough time to notify the airline, have your doctor fill out paperwork for the airline, and coordinate with an oxygen supplier.

Do I need to bring oxygen on the plane?

You might need to use oxygen during your flight, even if you do not use oxygen at home. Your healthcare provider can help determine whether you need oxygen on the plane. Some tests that your doctor might order include:

1. Pulse oximetry to check your oxygen level
2. Six-minute walk testing
3. Pulmonary function testing
4. Arterial blood gas measurement to check your oxygen and carbon dioxide levels
5. Echocardiography
6. "Hypoxia altitude simulation test" (HAST) – a test where your doctor measures your oxygen level while you breathe air with a reduced oxygen level (15% oxygen instead of 20%).

Based on these test results, your doctor might prescribe oxygen for you to use on the plane.

If your oxygen requirements are too high or if you have other medical conditions, your healthcare provider may instead advise you to not travel by air, since your oxygen levels may drop dangerously low in-flight.

If you do need oxygen during your flight, your doctor will tell you what oxygen flow setting you should use.

Will the airplane supply oxygen if my doctor prescribes it?

In the United States, airlines are required to allow passengers to use battery-powered portable oxygen concentrators that have been approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Most airlines require you to bring your own portable oxygen concentrator, but not all concentrators are allowed by all airlines. Each airline maintains a list of which portable oxygen concentrators they will allow on board. A small number of airlines will provide you with oxygen on board. There is usually a charge to use an airline's oxygen. Airlines will not allow you to bring filled oxygen tanks (green cylinders) or liquid oxygen onto the plane.

Your healthcare provider must complete paperwork ahead of time that instructs the airline about how and when you should use oxygen. Your healthcare provider can also help to arrange for a short-term oxygen concentrator rental from an oxygen supply company.

Looking for more information?

The PFF Help Center, a dedicated call center, provides patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers with the most up-to-date medical information, communicates the availability of support services, and provides information about other essential resources. Call or email today at **844.TalkPFF** (844.825.5733) or **help@pulmonaryfibrosis.org.**

Checklist for traveling with oxygen

- ☐ Prepare weeks or months ahead of time. See your doctor and notify the airline as early as possible. While some airlines may only need 48 hours of advance notice, it is advisable to prepare much earlier.
- ☐ Be aware of the airline's specific requirements regarding which oxygen concentrators are allowed and what paperwork is required. Contact your airline for further information.
- ☐ Be sure to bring enough batteries – and make sure they are fully charged! The FAA requires you to have battery life equal to 150% of your expected travel time. You should also factor in time needed to travel to the airport, waiting to board, layovers, and traveling from the airport to your destination after arrival. The airplane may or may not have an electrical outlet available if your batteries run out.
- ☐ Ask your doctor if you should monitor your oxygen level in flight with a portable pulse oximeter.
- ☐ If you are traveling outside the United States, different regulations may apply. Contact your airline for guidance. And remember to bring the correct electrical plug adapter for the country you are visiting.