

existing" health conditions. Many policies will not cover you for costs from your lung condition unless you have a written note from your doctor that he or she feels you are fit to fly.

***What else should I remember before flying?***

1. Ask your doctor well in advance for a letter to take in your hand luggage with details of your condition and medication.
2. Be sure to take your inhalers in your carry-on bags. One of the most common problems is that people pack their inhalers in the luggage that goes into the hold.
3. If you get breathless when walking, make sure you have help at airports. Distances to departure gates can be long. Disabled assistance at airports can be arranged before you travel.
4. When you are in the aeroplane try to move about every hour or so and exercise your legs. Sitting for too long can lead to blood clots in the legs.
5. Drink plenty of water and non-alcoholic drinks during the flight.
6. Remember the golden rule: **If in doubt about travelling, check with your doctor.**

*This leaflet was prepared by Dr Liesl M Osman  
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Air Travel Guidelines Working Party.  
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## **AIR TRAVEL WITH A LUNG CONDITION**



**THIS LEAFLET IS FOR ANYONE WITH A  
LUNG CONDITION, INCLUDING**

**COPD (Chronic obstructive pulmonary  
disease)**

**Asthma**

**Fibrosing alveolitis**

**Cystic fibrosis**

**Obstructive sleep apnoea**

**Pneumothorax**

**Previous DVT (blood clots in the veins)**

**Lung cancer**

**TB**

### ***Why does air travel affect people with lung conditions?***

A small number of people with lung conditions may have difficulties travelling by air due to the reduced air pressure in aircraft cabins. **People who have had infectious TB must not travel by air until shown to be non-infectious.**

### ***Why does the lower pressure in aircraft cabins affect people with lung conditions?***

Air pressure in an aircraft cabin is lower than air pressure at ground level. Being in an aircraft cabin is like being at 6000 to 8000 feet on a mountain. At high altitudes blood oxygen levels fall in everyone, and some people may feel a little breathless. In most people this has no health effect. But if you already have low blood oxygen levels because of your lung condition, then the extra dip that happens while you are in the plane can cause too much breathlessness and discomfort for you.

### ***How do I know if I might have difficulty travelling by air?***

People who can walk 50 metres on the level without needing oxygen, at a steady pace without feeling breathless or needing to stop, are not likely to be troubled by the reduced pressure in aircraft cabins.

If you cannot do this, you will need to talk to your doctor about whether you should travel by air. You may need to have some breathing tests. These will show if a fall in your blood oxygen level is likely to be a problem to you while travelling.

### ***Can I use oxygen to help me when travelling by air?***

**YES.** If tests show that your usual blood oxygen levels are so low that air travel may be a problem for you, you may still be able to travel by air, if oxygen is provided for you. Airlines can arrange extra oxygen, but remember that most will charge for

providing oxygen. Different airlines have different charges; check with each one before you arrange your flight.

Arrangements for oxygen must be made by your travel agent usually when booking your ticket, but at least one month before your trip.

Don't trust to luck that planes will have oxygen on board. They carry emergency supplies but not enough for several hours.

You need permission from the airline to take on board and use any electrical equipment you need for your treatment. Equipment must be battery driven, and you will not be allowed to use it during take off or landing. Using an inhaler with a spacer is just as effective as using a nebuliser.

### ***Does the length of the flight make a difference?***

Longer flights may carry health risks for anyone, because of the health effects of long periods sitting without much exercise. There is no evidence of extra risk for people with a lung condition, except for people with lung cancer who are more prone to DVT (clots in the veins).

### ***What happens if I get a chest infection while on holiday?***

Any chest infection should be completely treated before you fly home. You should have medical approval before flying home.

### ***Am I covered by medical insurance for any delays or difficulties due to my chest condition while on my trip?***

You may not be. Check your travel insurance policy. Make sure you are fully covered for any medical costs that arise in connection with your lung condition. It is important that your travel medical insurance includes the cost of return by air ambulance if you were to become too ill to return on a commercial flight. Some policies exclude costs from "pre