

PARKINSON'S AND TRAVELLING

A person with Parkinson's (PD) may face challenges while travelling due to changing mobility and energy levels and special concerns relating to medication. The following points can help you plan for a safe and memorable travel experience. *Don't let PD hold you back from the trip of your dreams!*

The Planning Stage

- Make a **detailed list** of what you need to take well in advance.
- Strategies for feeling well and managing stress:
 - Plan your trip within a **realistic assessment** of your stamina and overall health.
 - Whenever possible, **travel with a companion** and **avoid the busiest travel times**.
 - Be prepared for the **stress of travelling** to possibly make symptoms temporarily worse.
 - Plan for coping with possibly having an **“off” period** at a critical point, such as a customs line, airline check-in or other busy place.
 - Rest the day **before** and the day **after** your trip – “over doing it” can worsen PD symptoms.
 - Remember: Some last-minute changes or travel interruptions are beyond your control!
- See your doctor before you depart:
 - Ask your doctor for a **letter explaining that you have PD** (and other conditions if appropriate), medications, potential complications and your **doctor's phone number**.
 - Ask your doctor for the name of a **doctor in the area** where you are travelling.
 - Let your doctor's office know when and where you are going and for how long.
 - If possible, provide your doctor's office with the **phone number of a local pharmacy** at your destination in case you require a refill or your medications are lost or damaged.
- Specialized travel planning:
 - Consider planning your trip with a **travel agent** who specializes in working with **people with disabilities**. Schedule **extra time** into your plans.
 - Research the airline and hotel policies and regulations regarding **accommodations for people with disabilities**.
- Some things you might need:

- Take your PSCNO Medication Card, which contains room for your medication information, emergency contact info, and explains that you have Parkinson's
- Consider taking a **travel dictionary** to learn how to ask for medical and other help and how to describe PD symptoms in another language.
- Take **written confirmation** of your travel plans and leave a copy with a friend or family member at home.

Medication and Staying Well

- **Bring extra medication.** Many doctors advise travelling with **two complete packages** of essential medication in case of emergency. Ask your doctor for recommendations.
- Take your medications, vitamins and supplements in their **original bottles** for easier identification.
- Keep medications with you in carry-on baggage. **Do not check them in!**
- Be aware of **changes in temperature.** Many medications require a cool storage place and many must be kept out of direct sun-light.
- **Never store medication in the glove box** of a car as this area can be very warm.
- **Maintain your medication schedule** as closely as possible. Use a watch with an alarm or an alarmed pillbox, particularly if you are crossing time zones.
- Talk to your doctor about how you can adjust your medication schedule if necessary.
- Long hours of travel can upset your digestive system. Drink plenty of fluids, eat fibre rich foods and include some physical activity each day.¹
- Keep **snacks and bottled water** with you at all times.
- **Complete and carry a PSCNO Medication Card.** Ask a travelling companion to carry a duplicate.

Getting the Help You Need

- **Don't hesitate to make your needs known!**
- **Be specific and clear** when describing PD. Many service providers will not understand the medical terms relating to PD and your particular needs.
- Consider **requesting wheelchair services and luggage lifts** at airports or other terminals.
- Ask for **front seats on planes and buses** to avoid crowded aisles and to have maximum leg room. Balance this request with proximity to washrooms.

Travel Insurance

- Ensure you have **adequate travel insurance** to cover emergencies.
- Be sure your insurance **covers pre-existing conditions and medications** and is valid in the countries to which you are travelling.
- Stow the insurance certificate in your **carry-on bag** and put a **duplicate in another piece of luggage.**

Packing

- **Pack light** and use a **"fanny" pack or backpack so that you have both hands free.**
- Have **valid photo identification** in an easily accessible pocket or compartment.
- Use luggage with easy-rolling castors, large comfortable handles and easy-to-use zippers.

- Carry all **contact addresses and emergency numbers in an accessible compartment in your carry-on bag**. If you have a traveling companion, make a duplicate record for them to carry.
- Wear **shoes that easily slip off and on** for airport security.
- Bring a U-shaped pillow to support your neck.

1 Ask-A-Dietitian. Parkinson Society British Columbia Viewpoints Magazine, September 2009, Issue 27

Hotels

- Consider requesting **service for people with disabilities in hotels** and other tourist facilities.
- Most hotels have some rooms that are modified. These are often called “**accessible rooms**”.
- Consider booking these and call ahead to find out what features are available, eg. grab bars in bathrooms, roll-in shower, etc. “Accessible” does not mean the same thing in every place.
- When making hotel reservations, **request a room on the ground floor** or near an elevator.

Travel by Air

- Request a **non-stop flight and an aisle seat** near the bathroom.
- **Check-in as many bags as possible** to reduce the amount you carry. The limit of **one carry-on bag** and one personal bag **does not apply to medical supplies and/or assistive devices**.
- Assistive devices such as canes and wheelchairs are permitted onboard.
- A certificate written by your doctor for a wheelchair or scooter may be required.
- People in wheelchairs can request private, rather than public, checkpoint screenings.
- With documentation of medical need and with proper labelling, syringes are permitted onboard.
- Use **airport shuttles** and take advantage of **early boarding** options.
- Arrive at the airport well in advance.

Travel by Car

- Many Parkinson's medications can cause drowsiness. Plan to drive during your **best “on” times**.
- **Do not underestimate the demands of a long drive**. Break the trip into shorter distances with frequent stops or share the driving with someone else.
- **Take your disability parking permit with you** when you travel.

Travel by Bus or Train

- Wheelchair lifts are generally available for entrances and exits on both buses and trains. Call in advance to check if this is the case.
- **Seats can often be removed** to accommodate wheelchairs.
- Try to get an **aisle seat** near the exit.

Cruises

- Ocean liners offer scooters for rent during cruises.
- Ask in advance whether any ports of call require a license for a motorized wheelchair.

Sources:

Guide to Living with Parkinson's Disease, www.epda.eu.com

Parkinson's Disease: Making Travelling Easier, www.webmd.com

Parkinson's Onboard: Traveling with PD. National Parkinson Foundation, www.parkinson.org

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“Sit and Stretch”

Whether you are travelling by plane, train or car, it is important to stretch your muscles. Fortunately, you can stretch even in crowded spaces.

Stretching Helps

- To reduce the tightness that you may feel in your legs, back and neck if you sit too long.
- To reduce blood 'pooling' in your feet which can cause leg swelling.
- To reduce some of the stiffness and cramping associated with Parkinson's.

Use caution!

- Remember to stretch slowly – at least 10 seconds for each stretch.
- Avoid bouncing.
- Repeat each stretch 3 to 5 times.
- Listen to your body and reduce the stretch if you feel pain.

Some Simple Tips

- If you are on a plane or train, get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.
- If you are driving, pull over and get out of the car to stretch and get some fresh air on extended trips. This will keep you more alert and less stressed.
- Breathe! This helps relax your body and mind, as well as relieving tension in your shoulders and neck. Breathe in slowly, hold your breath briefly and breathe out slowly.
- If your muscles feel tight it is time to stretch.
- Sit as comfortably and as straight as possible.
- Avoid alcohol; although it may help you relax on a plane, it can lead to dehydration, dizziness when standing and sore muscles if you fall asleep in an awkward position.
- Drink plenty of water.

Exercise During Flight

(adapted from Quantus.com)

All of the following exercises are intended to be done while sitting in your seat on a plane.

Ankle Circles

- Lift feet off the floor. Draw a circle with the toes, simultaneously moving one foot clockwise and the other foot counter clockwise. Reverse.
- Rotate in each direction for 15 seconds.
- Repeat if desired.

Foot Pumps

- Start with both heels on the floor and point toes upward as high as you can.
- Put both feet flat on the floor then lift heels high, keeping balls of feet on the floor.
- Repeat in a continuous motion and in 30-second intervals.

Knee Lifts

- Lift leg with knee bent while contracting your thigh muscle.
- Alternate legs.
- Repeat ten times for each leg.

Neck Roll

- With shoulders relaxed, drop ear to shoulder and gently roll neck to opposite shoulder forward and back, holding each position about five seconds.
- Repeat five times.

Knee to Chest

- Bend forward slightly. Clasp hands around the left knee and hug it towards your chest.
- Hold stretch for 15 seconds. Keeping hands around the knee, slowly let it down.
- Alternate legs.
- Repeat ten times.

Forward Flex

- With both feet on the floor and stomach held in, slowly bend forward and walk your hands down the front of your legs toward your ankles.
- Hold stretch for 15 seconds and slowly sit back up.

Shoulder Roll

- Hunch your shoulders and roll them forward, then roll them up, back, and down, using a gentle circular motion.

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