



# Traveling with COPD

## Breathing Problems Don't Have to Ground You



You may have worked hard your entire life planning to spend time traveling when you retire. When you are diagnosed with COPD or other breathing problems, you may feel that your plans have been dashed. Although COPD may cause an adjustment in your planning, there is no reason why you can't continue with your dream to "see the world" simply because of your breathing problems. With proper planning, people with breathing problems can continue to travel extensively.

### Planning and Preparation

Frequently, fear prevents people from travel. Fear of being far away from home and their physician and having a problem occur. The questions start, "What would I do if I had a flat tire? What would I do if my oxygen machine quit? What would I do if...?" Asking questions is certainly normal and prudent in preparation for a trip. But rather than letting questions stop your travel, use them to plan for arrangements that will be needed to make your trip a success.

Start by writing out your questions and then write a plan for how you would deal with each situation. For example, for the question, "What would I do if I have a flat tire or other car trouble?" Possible solutions might include practice changing a tire before leaving using oxygen to see if you can do it, carrying a can of "Fix a Flat" for leaks, getting a membership to AAA or other roadside assistance clubs, or carrying a cell phone or CB radio to be able to call for assistance if needed. It might even be as simple as traveling with a friend or planning to call someone every few hours while traveling (arrange to let it ring twice and hang up to save money). If they don't hear from you at the allotted time, they could alert someone in the area to check on you.



The following tips will give you more ideas as you plan for your trip:

1. **Start with a short trip and build.** Maybe that trip around the world is not the place to start. Start with an overnight trip or even a day trip that's a short drive from your home.
2. **Leave time to prepare.** The bigger the trip, the more preparation it will require. Some airlines require significant notice (weeks) if oxygen will be required.

3. **Get help.** Ask your home respiratory therapist to help you plan. Special equipment may be available to make your trip easier. How will equipment be transported or should equipment from another provider be available at the destination?

4. **Travel time.** Travel during the time of day that is best for your breathing. Travel is tiring. Remember to take all medications before and while traveling and leave breaks for frequent rests stops, nebulizer treatments, or other care that requires a stop.

5. **Copy records and medication prescriptions.** Take a copy of prescriptions and even a summary of your medical history on extended trips, just in case it is necessary to see another doctor while there.

6. **Find a physician and equipment provider at the destination.** For extended stays or long distance trips, it is best to obtain the name of a physician and equipment provider that could service you if needed. If you are traveling a long distance by car, you may even want to get the name and number of providers along the route.

7. **Contact the transportation provider.** If traveling by airline, bus, train, or other public transportation and you require oxygen or other special arrangements, call in advance and obtain a written copy of their requirements for traveling with special medical needs.

8. **Plan for medications.** If flying, carry medications and other necessities in a carry-on bag just in case your luggage is lost. You may even want to carry an extra supply in a separate bag, just in case one supply is lost.

9. **Carry extra portable oxygen.** Important for unforeseen delays or just an extra stop to see the “Worlds Largest Ball of Aluminum Foil.”

10. **Consider features of the route and destination.** Seasonal allergies, altitude, weather, humidity, pollution, and other factors during your travels and at your final destination may be different than from where you live and can affect breathing.

11. **Avoid infections.** Avoid areas where colds, flu, or other infections are present in increased numbers. Due to more contact with large groups of people, it may be best to travel during times when infections are less prevalent.

12. **For air travel, special considerations include:**

- Airlines will not let you carry your own portable oxygen on the plane. You will have to make arrangements for the airline to provide oxygen on the plane. Expect an additional cost for each “leg” of the flight.
- Although the cabin is pressurized, traveling in an airplane is similar to being at 5-8,000 feet above sea level. Oxygen users may need a little higher flow at altitude and people that don’t normally require oxygen at rest may have a need while flying. Consult your doctor as to how you may be affected.
- Since you will not be able to carry your own oxygen system, you will have to have a supply waiting on the other end of each flight. If the flight is not direct to your final



destination, you may have to make arrangements for transfers from one plane to another at airports.

Travel and other enjoyable activities are extremely important to maintaining a good quality of life. Don't let your breathing problems stop you from enjoying these pleasures. Leave plenty of time to plan your trip well, enlist help, prepare the best you can, and then enjoy, enjoy, enjoy!

