

Travel Tips and Considerations for Helping Your Pulmonary Hypertension (PH) Patients Plan Ahead and Enjoy Their Trips

Planning Ahead: General Travel Considerations

- Talk to patients about any travel plans. It is important for them (and you) to understand risks and benefits of traveling. Patients may review the Pulmonary Hypertension Association's (PHA) "Traveling with PH" resources (<https://phassociation.org/patients/living-with-ph/traveling-with-ph/>), but there also may be specific matters that pertain to them individually for their care team to address.
- Provide patients with a list of the PH centers closest to their travel destinations; include names, addresses and phone numbers for hospitals, PH physicians and nurse coordinators.
- Some patients may need oxygen at altitude that do not require oxygen normally. Prior to Air travel or traveling to elevation consider having patients perform a High Altitude Simulation Test (HAST).
- Each airline has its own policy regarding travel with oxygen and typically requires a signed physician order. Not all airlines allow portable oxygen concentrators (POC), which is the only way travelers can use oxygen in-flight. Patients should check with the airline to make sure they allow POCs on their flights and to ask if there are any fees to do so.
 - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has approved several POCs for in-flight use, but filled O₂ tanks cannot be checked as baggage or carried onto any airline (though some airlines do allow empty tanks to be checked as baggage). If patients have their own POC, they should check with the manufacturer to determine if it is approved for in-flight use.
 - Patients must contact their oxygen provider in advance to see if they can be provided with a POC that is FAA-approved. If not, they will need to rent or purchase one.
 - **Backup batteries also are imperative** to ensure that the patient will have sufficient battery power throughout the flight. Patients should check their flight status for delays; at check-in, they must have battery power for at least 50 percent longer than their scheduled flight.
 - Most airlines require at least 48 hours' notice before a passenger flies with oxygen.
 - Many airlines have their own specific medical form for their doctor to fill out regarding their need to travel with oxygen. The airline's form(s) must be completed and the patient will need their oxygen prescription to fly with oxygen.
 - Provide an airline appeal letter to patients who are traveling with intravenous or subcutaneous medications requesting permission for them to fly with medical equipment and/or medications and/or oxygen. A template letter can be found at <https://phassociation.org/patients/insurance/how-to-file-an-insurance-claim/template-letters/>.
- If patients are taking a cruise, have them ask the cruise line what kind of medical services are available on the ship. For patients traveling with intravenous prostacyclin, ask if the cruise ship has personnel trained in placing IV catheters in case of emergency or loss of use of the central line catheter.
- Encourage patients to be up to date on any vaccinations and immunizations and to research any necessary vaccines for travel outside the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website is a good resource for obtaining safe tips on traveling abroad and have specific information for every location. www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Planning Ahead: PH Medications

- Encourage patients and their travel companions to be knowledgeable about PH and their medications. Explain to patients that they need to adhere to their medication regimen and prescribed dosages of their PH medication and should not titrate their dose(s) up or down during the trip.
- Patients must take all necessary supplies for prostacyclin infusions. They should consult with their nurse or pharmacist about premixing medications, as well as scheduling medication preparation during travel.
- Encourage patients to talk to their specialty pharmacy about having enough medication for the planned length of the trip AND if extra doses are recommended in case of delay in returning home. Plan to have enough medication on arrival back home.
- Medications, medical supplies, oxygen concentrators, CPAP machines, medication and/or oxygen prescriptions and any other necessary forms should be carried onto the plane and not checked with baggage.

Planning Ahead: Illness Away from Home

- Patients who are prone to illnesses with travel may want to ask their provider for an as-needed prescription for relief of traveler's diarrhea, motion sickness and/or nausea and vomiting. Patients should carry on all PRN medications when traveling.

Planning Ahead: Travel Insurance

- Travel insurance is usually an additional option when purchasing plane tickets. Patients should check with their specific medical insurance plan for coverage options while traveling and be aware that they may be outside of their network while traveling. Patients should read the fine print and ask the airlines, hotels, cruise lines, etc., about their trip cancellation policies if an unexpected event or illness occurs.

Planning Ahead: Amenities/Rooms

- There usually are some larger disability rooms available for the same price. These are recommended for patients to accommodate extra equipment, such as a wheelchair and oxygen. These rooms should be requested when booking the vacation, not at check-in.
- Patients should request delivery of a refrigerator to their rooms for medications that require refrigeration. IV epoprostenol patients must inquire about obtaining a freezer and/or ice packs.

Planning Ahead: Activities and Excursions

- Counsel patients to avoid activities that risk dislodging the IV or SQ infusion lines or increase intravascular pressure. Examples include zip lining, jumping off cliffs or swimming. Patients traveling to higher elevations should consider that high altitudes may make their PH symptoms worse.

- Remind patients that they must take all of their medications and/or supplies with them when leaving their hotel or cruise ship for an activity or excursion. Travel companions should help carry back-up supplies.

Planning Ahead: Dietary Recommendations

- Reiterate the importance of adhering to sodium and fluid restrictions to patients on diuretics. Discuss the need to be aware of the sodium content of restaurant foods, and the potential for consuming foods high in sodium while traveling.
- For all patients traveling outside the U.S., there are important alerts to be aware of when consuming foods and water due to lack of regulations on packaging and cooking of meats, vegetables, fruits and dairy. In some countries, water is not drinkable unless sold in bottles.

Quality of Life Enhancement

- Vacations can be a great way to encourage patients to “live their best life.”
- Many patients find travel to be very liberating and relaxing.
- If patients become tired, they can return to the room to rest, then resume their activities.