

Traveling Smart with Parkinson's Disease

Traveling requires a lot of preparation for a person with Parkinson's disease. Whether traveling for work or leisure, alone or with a companion, there's plenty to consider before departing. Each individual needs to know how important it is for a person with Parkinson's disease to anticipate the difficulties that may arise while away from home.

Planning ahead for seamless travel

When beginning to plan a trip, you first need to decide which mode of transportation will best meet your needs. Plane, train, or automobile? Does each mode of transportation offer the accessibility you need, or extra time to board?

If you are going to fly, be sure to look up the [TSA special procedures](#), which can help reduce stress and anxiety through the screening process or consider enrolling in the TSA PreCheck program. You can print out a TSA notification card that describes your medical condition. There's no need to explain your specific condition. Once you state that you have special needs or require extra time to board a plane, that's all you have to say.

If you have a DBS (deep brain stimulation), ask your doctor to write a note to allow you to bypass electronic security and undergo other security checks instead. Part of the screening process can be done while sitting so you don't fatigue as quickly.

Consider taking a wheelchair through the airport. Airport terminals are large and can be confusing to navigate, leading to a potential increase in stress levels. Don't be afraid to ask for help when planning your trip and plan to arrive early so you have plenty of time and don't have to rush.

Make sure that you pack three different sets of medications in three different bags to ensure that you will always have your medications in case a bag or two gets lost. Medications should be brought in their original labeled bottles. Liquid medications can go over the three-ounce fluid limit but should be packed separately from other fluids.

Research accommodations to relieve stress

Be sure to inquire about specific accommodations ahead of time. For instance, if you use a wheelchair or other mobility aid, confirm that your hotel room is wheelchair accessible and request a room near the elevator or on the first floor. Inquire about special accommodations that most hotels will offer at no extra charge, such as shower seats. If you'll be sightseeing, confirm ahead of time whether the sites you want to visit offer wheelchair rentals and are wheelchair accessible.

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If you are driving, ask about parking for your car. Many facilities offer complimentary or discounted parking if you display a “handicapped” sign. If you are driving to your destination, look for valet parking opportunities at restaurants, hotels, etc.

Once you have finalized your travel plans, keep them organized by carrying a printed itinerary, complete with emergency contact information or program them into your cell phone or iPad. Either print or send a copy of your travel plans to a friend or relative who is not going on the trip. It is imperative to always carry a cell phone with you and make sure that numbers and contacts are preprogrammed in your phone. If you are traveling overseas, be sure to have the address and contact information for the US Embassy. It is wise to have your passport with you at all times or locked in a hotel safe.

Getting ready for the trip

Make sure you get a good night’s sleep before leaving on your trip. Keep your sightseeing schedule flexible, and build in mini-rests and one nap every day. Don’t try to pack your day too full of activities. This will only make you more tired and increase the risk of Parkinson’s flare-ups, which can lead to an unpleasant trip.

Making a packing list ahead of time can reduce anxiety over forgetting something. As your trip gets near, start packing slowly so you don’t get stressed about the process or forget something because you are in a rush. Sort out your outfits complete with socks, undergarments, and shoes. Include Parkinson’s-friendly clothing and accessories, such as wrinkle-free items, pants with elastic waistbands, or shirts that can be pulled over the head or with snap closures. Avoid clothing with buttons if possible, as it can complicate the dressing process. Pack needed assistive equipment (such as a walker), and always take a cane or walking stick, making certain your name is labeled on each item.

Staying healthy on the go

It is important to stay well hydrated, avoid caffeine, and eat salty snacks if you have postural hypotension. Wearing support stockings while traveling can also help reduce symptoms of postural hypotension.

Bring a bottle of water for taking pills as well as a light snack, if needed, to prevent nausea. Many worry that they will drink too much and then have to use the bathroom frequently, but changing positions frequently and stretching is important while traveling long distances, so use the bathroom as an opportunity to move around. Try to avoid drinking too much alcohol.

If you run into a situation where you are without medication, call your doctor’s office and ask them to send an electronic prescription to a local pharmacy. You should always travel with an updated list of your medications, the dosages, scheduled times for dosing as well as your allergies. This information will also be essential if you end up visiting a doctor’s office or emergency room while traveling. The National Parkinson’s Foundation created an [Aware in Care Kit](#) that is available through their website and is designed to help those with Parkinson’s disease receive the best possible care during a hospital stay.

Talk to your doctor before going on vacation to get tips on adjusting dosages if you are changing time zones; you may need to increase or decrease dosing of medication. You should avoid doing any type of medication changes two weeks before leaving for your vacation, as you don’t know how your body will react to the change.

Traveling does not have to end when Parkinson’s advances. By taking time to plan everything in advance, you can focus on having fun!