

Travelling with Parkinson's



A person with Parkinson's may face challenges while travelling due to changing mobility, energy levels and special concerns relating to medication. The following points can help you plan for a safe and memorable travel experience.

Planning for travel

- Make a detailed list of what you need to take well with you in advance of your travels.
- Use strategies for feeling well and managing stress, such as:
 - Planning your trip within a realistic assessment of your stamina and overall health.
 - Whenever possible, traveling with a companion and avoiding the busiest travel times.
 - Being prepared that the stress of travelling may make symptoms temporarily worse.
 - Planning for coping with the possibility of having a medication “off” period at a critical time, such as in a customs line, airline check-in, or in similarly busy places.
 - Resting the day before and the day after your trip.
 - Remembering that some last-minute changes or travel interruptions are beyond your control.
- See your doctor before departing.
 - Ask your doctor for a letter explaining that you have PD (and other conditions if applicable), along with a list of medications you take, potential complications and their contact information.
 - Ask your doctor for the name of a doctor that specializes or understands Parkinson's disease in the area where you are travelling, if possible.
 - 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.
 - Ensure you are up to date with all required vaccinations for your destination, including COVID-19.

- Consider specialized travel planning, such as:
 - Planning your trip with a travel agent who specializes in working with people with disabilities.
 - Scheduling extra time into your plans.
 - Researching the applicable airline and hotel policies and regulations regarding accommodations for people with disabilities.
- Consider special items to prepare, such as:
 - Creating and carrying a card with the following wording: “I have Parkinson’s disease. Sometimes I have difficulty speaking and moving. Please allow me extra time. In case of an emergency, contact...”
 - Taking a travel dictionary to learn how to ask for medical and other help, and how to describe Parkinson’s 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 your carry-on baggage. Do not check them.
- Be aware of changes in temperature. Many medications require a cool storage place, and many must be kept out of direct sunlight.
- 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 pill box, or set a timer on your phone, 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.
- Keep snacks and bottled water with you at all times.



Getting the help you need

- Never hesitate to make your needs known.
- Be specific and clear when describing Parkinson's. Many service providers will not understand the medical terms relating to Parkinson's, its symptoms, 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 in case one is lost.

Packing for comfort

- Pack light and use a belt bag or backpack, so that you have both hands free whenever possible.
- 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.
- Carry a water bottle with you whenever possible. Be sure to drink plenty of water when travelling.
- Wear shoes that easily slip off and on for airport security.
- Bring a U-shaped pillow to support your neck.

Hotels

- Consider requesting service for people with disabilities in hotels and other tourist facilities.

- Most hotels have some modified rooms, usually referred to as accessible rooms. Consider booking these and call ahead to find out what features are available, such as grab bars in bathrooms, and roll-in showers. Remember that “accessible” does not mean the same thing everywhere.
- When making hotel reservations, request a room on the ground floor, or near an elevator.

Air travel

- 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 checkpoint screenings.
- With accompanying 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.
- Get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.
- 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.

Exercises during flights

Ankle circles

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

Foot pumps

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

Exercises during flights (cont.)

Ankle circles

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

Foot pumps

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

Knee lifts

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

Shoulder roll

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

Neck roll

- With shoulders relaxed, drop ear to shoulder and gently roll neck to opposite shoulder forward and back, looking down, holding each position for 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 and 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.

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 your 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.
- In trains, get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.

Cruises

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

Parkinson Canada would like to acknowledge Parkinson Society British Columbia for granting permission to reprint their valuable information resource.

1-888-664-1974 | support@parkinson.ca
parkinson.ca

The contents of this document are provided for information purposes only, and do not represent advice, an endorsement or a recommendation, with respect to any product, service or enterprise, and/or the claims and properties thereof, by Parkinson Canada.