

Travelling with bladder and bowel conditions



Introduction

Travelling does not necessarily need to be more difficult for someone who has a bladder and/or bowel condition or incontinence. However, it may take more planning and preparation to make it as straight forward as possible.

General suggestions

Contact the airline or travel company to discuss your individual needs and how they may be able to meet these before booking/travelling.

Think about what you will need to carry with you and have any supplies you need for the journey easily available. This may include medication that you need to take on the journey, continence products such as urinals, pads or catheters, cleaning materials including wipes and bags for disposal. You may wish to have these in a separate small bag. Make sure that you have spares with you in case you get delayed.

Carry hand sanitiser and wet wipes with you, so that you can still clean yourself and your hands if you are unable to reach a sink and soap.

If you plan to change your routines or any products that you usually use while away, try these out before you go, to make sure they work for you.

Accessing the toilet

If you need to use the toilet frequently or urgently, or have mobility issues, and are flying or travelling by train or coach, try to book a seat near the toilet and on the aisle. You could use a small disposable continence pad inside close fitting underwear if you have concerned about possible leaks if you are unable to get to the toilet quickly enough.

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If you are using your own car and have sufficient privacy or if you are travelling somewhere with limited access to a toilet you could consider using a urinal. These are available for all genders and can be used discretely in your seat. If you chose one with a lid it can be emptied into a toilet later. Special absorbent powders are available that change urine into a semi-solid gel that is still fully flushable. These will reduce the risk of splashes and spills. There are a wide range of urinals available both to purchase and on prescription. There is more information in our resource library at the Bladder & Bowel UK website.

If possible, research where the toilets are on your journey and at places you will visit before you leave home. There are some useful websites to help you locate toilets in the UK including **Locations**, **The Great British Toilet** map and **Changing Places**, which are accessible toilets with full size changing tables and hoists. Apps to find toilets include **Flush**, **The Toilet Finder**, **The Toilet Map** and **Toilets 4 London**.

Many disabled toilets require a RADAR key to unlock them. These are available to purchase at a number of online retailers. **Bladder & Bowel UK** provide a free 'Just Can't Wait' card that is widely recognised and may allow increased access to toilets. To order one visit the Bladder & Bowel UK website.

Clothing

When you are travelling consider wearing clothing that is comfortable and easy to rearrange. Elastic waists, and drop front pants (ones that have poppers or Velcro on the side seams) can be easier to manage.

Dark coloured clothing reduces visibility of any leaks and loose clothing is easier to remove and to change. Consider having a spare set of clothes and some wet wipes in a plastic bag in your hand luggage or travel bag, in case you need to change when travelling.

Disposable continence products

If you are worried about leakage when you are travelling, you could consider using a seat protector on the journey. Both washable and disposable seat protector pads are available to purchase. You may also be able to purchase a more absorbent version of your usual product to use on the journey.

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Many disposable products are quite bulky and can take up a lot of your suitcase. You may be able to use smaller products, that take up less space, or pack them in a vacuum bag to reduce the space they need. Washable products take up less space and may be an option for those that can manage to launder these while away. Men could consider using a sheath with a leg bag for urinary incontinence.

If you purchase your products, the company you buy them from may be able to deliver the products to your holiday destination, or you may be able to send a supply ahead yourself. However, it is a good idea to take some with you, in case there is a problem and they are delayed or do not arrive.

Climate can affect continence products. High humidity or damp environments may reduce the absorbency of disposable continence products. High temperatures can affect adhesive tapes, such as those on some continence products and ones used to secure sheaths.

Catheters

If you use an indwelling catheter and are going on a long journey, you may wish to use a larger drainage bag, to reduce the frequency with which it will need emptying. If you are going to be sitting for a long period of time, make sure that there are no kinks in your catheter or drainage bag tubing.

If you use clean intermittent catheterisation you may be able to use a catheter with an integral drainage bag, or you could use a portable urinal to hold the urine until you can access a toilet. If you have any concerns about managing on the journey or while away, talk to your healthcare professional. They may be able to make some suggestions that would help you.

If you are travelling abroad obtain a medical validation or travel certificate from your catheter provider. This will explain in different languages why you are carrying catheters. It also has a section asking officials to be discrete.

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If you are travelling in a country with poor water quality (places where you are advised not to drink the tap water), use bottled or cooled boiled water or consider asking your healthcare professional if you can have ready-to-use hydrophilic catheters to use while you are away.

Antibacterial wipes will allow you to make sure that any surfaces you use for your equipment are clean. Hand sanitiser will allow you to clean your hands prior to catheterising if you have difficulty finding clean water and soap.

Your healthcare professional should be able to discuss safe options that would be appropriate for you.

Transanal irrigation

You should follow your healthcare professional's advice if you are using transanal irrigation. However, you may be able to adjust the timing of your irrigation, so that you can have a bowel motion before you leave home and not need another until after you have reached your destination.

If you are in a country with poor water quality (places where you are advised not to drink tap water), then use bottled or cooled boiled water for your irrigation. You may be able to warm this to the correct temperature, by placing the bottled water into a basin of warm water for a few minutes before using it. It is important to check the temperature of the water is correct before you use it.

Drinking when travelling

While it is tempting to restrict your fluid intake when travelling this can cause dehydration and increase the likelihood of urinary tract infections and constipation. Concentrated urine can also irritate the bladder lining, which may trigger urgency or wetting. It is important to drink plenty of water-based drinks to prevent these.

Drinks containing caffeine (tea, coffee, hot chocolate, cola and many energy drinks), fizzy drinks and alcohol can all increase urine production and may also irritate the bladder lining triggering urgency.

Travelling with a bladder or bowel condition

Travelling with bowel issues

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Special considerations if you are flying

Let the airline know when booking and at least 48 hours before your departure if you need extra support at the airport or during your flight, or if you need to carry medication or other medical supplies. You do have a right to have support to move around the plane, including to get to the toilets if you have a sensory, physical or learning disability. However, you must fly with a companion if you need help with using the toilet.

If you use medication, continence products, sheaths, catheters, or bowel irrigation, then make sure you have some in your hand luggage in case your main luggage is lost or delayed. You could also divide your products between your luggage and that of a travelling companion.

If you need to carry more than 100mls of liquid medication or other liquids for medical reasons, you must check what is allowed with your airline before you fly. You will probably need a letter from your doctor explaining what any medicines and medical supplies are for and you will need to declare them at security.

Airlines exempt some equipment from luggage restrictions. Consider contacting the airline to see if continence products are exempt from restrictions if you are going away for more than a few days and need extra luggage space.

Try to use the toilet at the airport prior to boarding the plane and try to use the toilet on the plane prior to landing. This will help if you are delayed with taking off or landing. If you use an indwelling catheter, empty your catheter bag before the flight.

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Consider completing a travel certificate before you leave home. This explains your condition and any supplies that you need to carry through security. It will also outline that you need extra privacy. You can ask to have any searches done in a private area at the airport. Contact your transport operator before you travel if you are worried about luggage or body searches and possible exposure of your continence products. You can also ask to be allowed to board the flight early to ensure you have time to get settled with everything you may need during your flight easily accessible to you.

Further information

Find more information about adult bladder and bowel health in our information library at www.bbuk.org.uk. You can also contact the [Bladder & Bowel UK confidential helpline](tel:01612144591) (0161 214 4591).

For further advice on bladder and bowel problems speak to your GP or other healthcare professional.
