



# International Travel and your Medication

Patient Information Sheet



**This information booklet looks at how to plan your holiday, including preparing your medication, transport accessibility and getting medical treatment abroad.**

### **What do I need to think about when planning a holiday?**

Lots of people with Arthritis, Connective Tissue diseases and Osteoporosis travel; there should be no reason for the condition to stop you from enjoying trips home and abroad.

Make your next trip as pain free as possible, the stress and tension that often comes with a trip can add to physical discomfort and worsen joint symptoms. With a little research and proper planning you can reduce pain and anxiety and have a pleasant journey.

If you are planning a break for yourself or someone else with Arthritis, Connective Tissue diseases and osteoporosis you may just need to do some extra planning to make sure the holiday meets your needs.

Think about what sort of holiday would suit your needs. For example:

- Are you an independent traveller or would you prefer to take an organised tour?
- What type of accommodation would be best?
- Would rather travel by rail than air.
- Would having a travel buddy be helpful for sharing driving and help with baggage and finding healthy food
- Assistive devices can be a great help too. Examples include a folding cane or walker, travel chair, beaded seat cover or something as simple as an extra pillow for back support.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office website has advice, information and tips about foreign travel. You may find this helpful when you are researching the country or countries you will be visiting.

## **How can I be clear about my needs when I book a trip?**

When you book a holiday or make travel arrangements, explain clearly what you need to your travel or booking agent. Be careful not to assume that people will understand what sort of assistance people with Arthritis, Connective Tissue diseases and Osteoporosis may need.

The Association of British Travel Agents has a helpful checklist on its website for disabled and less mobile passengers. It can be completed by you or your travel agent. The information you provide can be used to check whether the transport, accommodation and facilities at your destination meet your needs.

## **What will make my stay on holiday more comfortable?**

When booking accommodation consider what your needs are. For example can you manage stairs unaided? If you can't, you may want to check the accommodation has a lift, or ask for a ground floor room. Some hotels may also be able to offer rooms that have been specifically adapted for disabled people, which you may find useful.

You should ask for written confirmation that what you have asked for is available when you book. Confirm the arrangements again with the hotel before you leave for your trip.

If you need specific equipment at the hotel during your stay, such as a wheelchair or a raised toilet seat, ask the place where you are staying if they can provide this. Where they can't, you may be able to hire equipment for the duration of your stay. Mobility Equipment Hire Direct provides equipment for hire, and can deliver to your hotel, apartment or villa on holiday, both in the UK and abroad.

## **How can I prepare my medication before I travel?**

### **Starting New Medication**

Whenever possible try not to start a new medication just before holiday travel, remember some of the Disease Modifying Anti Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs) and Biologic therapies require you to have blood tests frequently (2 weekly) within the initial 12 weeks.

### **Travel Letter**

Before you travel, ask your GP or Rheumatology Clinical Nurse Specialist for a letter that lists the medication you are taking.

You might need this for when you go through customs or if you are taken ill.

If you are carrying syringes or needles, make sure that your medication travel letter includes this information.

Please note: The Department of Rheumatology requires at least 10 working days' notice to provide you with this information.

### **Refrigerated Medication**

Pack medicines that require refrigeration such as some biologics, in a small cooler bag or in a Ziploc bag with an icepack. Biologic Medication when exposed to extremes of heat can affect the drugs in many ways. Keep Biologics in hand luggage if you are taking a plane; if it goes in the cargo hold with the luggage it might freeze which also can affect the Biologic Drug.

If you are going on a long, hot car journey or to a very hot country then you might want to look at ways to keep the Biologic Drug protected.

Here is a selection of bags, wallets, fridges and travel friendly accessories that will allow you to keep your drugs cool on the move.

In some kitchen shops there are clever lunch boxes with little freezer packs, often used to keep salads cool and fresh and these too would work for keeping drugs safe and cool and you can choose from different sizes as to what would work best for you.

Frio Wallets and Chillerz Packs, Polar Gear and Generic Cool Packs and Carry Cases

There are many brand of pharmacy cool bags which offer simple and convenient cooling wallets. Light and compact, they are a means for Biologic Drugs to transport.

- <https://friouk.com/>
- <https://www.polargear.com/lunchbags-and-bottles.html>



### **Needles, Syringes, Auto injectors and Sharps boxes**

Airlines have very strict rules about sharp objects on board, so you may be asked why you are carrying them. Remember in addition to the needles, syringes/ auto injectors you will require a travel sharps box, these are available on prescription or you can obtain them from the Department of Rheumatology. Ensure that they are large enough to contain all the items you need to dispose of.

### **Additional Travel Supply of medication**

Ask your GP to provide you with a prescription for extra medication to cover the length of your trip. For example, if you are going on holiday for two weeks, take four weeks medication just in case.

### **Medication Information**

In the bottom of your suit case pack copies of the Arthritis Research UK leaflets about your medication.

## **Restricted Medications**

DMARDS and Biologic therapies are not usually restricted by other countries, however remember some other medication such as Analgesia (pain killers) may be. We recommend that you check with the Embassy or High Commission of the country you are visiting to see if they have any restrictions on taking your medication into that country. Some medication may contain ingredients that are illegal where you are going to.

## **Transporting medication**

Always carry your medication in the original packaging and keep it in your hand luggage. If you are passing through security at an airport, it's useful to keep your medication together in a clear, sealable bag.

## **Will I need to have vaccinations?**

Depending on where you are going, you may need vaccinations to protect you against certain diseases. Your GP will be able to advise you which ones you may need. Some are available on the NHS, but others you may need to pay for.

If you have any concerns about how vaccinations may affect your arthritis or connective tissue disease, you should talk to your GP.

**Remember:** if you are taking DMARDS or Biologics you may not be able to have any "live vaccine".

## **Will I need to adjust my medication routine while I'm away?**

If you are going abroad, you may need to alter your medication regimen; especially if you are travelling across time zones. Sometimes this may mean you need to take your medication at different times, but within the same hourly spread, or it may mean taking an extra tablet.

As everybody's medication regimen is different, it is very important you speak to your GP or Rheumatology Clinical Nurse Specialist, if needed they will be able to help you work out the best way to take your medication while you are travelling and after you reach your destination.

You may also want to carry a Methotrexate or a Biologic alert card you can obtain one of these by contacting the Patient Advice and Information Line.

- Telephone 023 9228 6935
- Email [pho-tr.rheumatology@nhs.net](mailto:pho-tr.rheumatology@nhs.net)

## **What happens if I need medical treatment on holiday?**

### **European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) allows you to receive free or subsidised medical treatment in all European Economic Area (EEA) countries.

For more information visit:

**<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-ehic-european-health-insurance-card/>**

You can get the EHIC if you are normally resident in the UK and are British. You are also eligible if you are of EU/EAA or Swiss nationality. The card is valid for up to five years.

The EHIC covers medical treatment you may need while you are on your trip. This includes any treatment that may be necessary for a chronic or pre-existing medical condition.

Not everything that would be free on the NHS is covered by the EHIC. But you should be able to get the same treatment as a resident of the country you are visiting receives. If you do have to pay anything towards your care, it may be possible to get a refund when you return to the UK. If you need to make a claim once you return to the UK, you should call the EHIC Overseas Healthcare Team.

**Remember:** The EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance. It does not cover private medical healthcare or the cost of being flown back to the UK, for example. So it is important to have both a valid EHIC and a travel insurance policy when you travel.



### **Medical treatment outside Europe**

The UK does have agreements with some countries outside Europe that may mean you are still able to receive healthcare in an emergency.

This treatment may be free of charge or you may have to pay a reduced rate. If you are charged for treatment, you will not be able to apply for a refund from the UK Government when you return home.

To get treatment, you will usually need to show your British passport and proof of residence, such as a driving licence.

For more information about getting medical treatment outside Europe, you can visit:

**[www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad](http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad)**

### **Should I get travel insurance?**

It is important to have a valid travel insurance policy before you go on holiday. It will cover any medical costs that the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) doesn't such as private healthcare.

It usually also covers non-medical emergencies, such as travel delays or the cost of replacing lost or stolen luggage.

Always check the level of cover a policy offers. If you have Arthritis, Connective Tissue Diseases or Osteoporosis, make sure the policy covers pre-existing medical conditions. If you don't declare a medical condition and need to make a claim, your policy may be invalid.



When you buy your travel insurance policy, it's a good idea to shop around. Depending on how many trips you are planning to make in a year, a multi-trip policy may be cheaper than buying a single trip one each time you travel.

Think about buying travel insurance as soon as you have booked your holiday. You will then be covered between booking and the date you travel in case anything happens. Good travel insurance policies will cover the cost of cancelling your trip if you are unwell and can't go.

If you are planning on taking any equipment or mobility aids with you, make sure they are insured for loss or damage. Standard travel insurance policies don't always cover these items. Your household insurance may provide cover for these items, or you may have to pay an extra premium.



### **I'm travelling by air. What do I need to consider before I fly?**

By law it is illegal for an airline to refuse a booking on the grounds of disability. Airlines are also not allowed to refuse to allow a disabled person to board an aircraft when they have a valid ticket and reservation. This applies to any flight leaving an airport in the EU and flights on European airlines arriving in the EU.

Most airlines can offer help if you need assistance, as long as they know in advance – normally 48 hours before your flight. Airlines can arrange a wheelchair escort to meet you from the car park, train station or taxi and take you through check-in.

They can also arrange for you to be taken to your departure gate and boarded first. At your destination, you can be escorted off the plane and taken through passport control and customs.

Even if you don't usually use a wheelchair, you may want to consider arranging an escort at the airport. It can be particularly helpful on long flights or flights involving transfers.

You may want to call several airlines and compare the different levels of service offered before booking your trip. Ask what sort of assistance they can offer and if there are any added fees. They may also have some information on their website. EU regulations have made it compulsory for all large European airports to offer free assistance to older or disabled passengers.

If you are travelling with your own wheelchair or other aids, most airlines will carry two pieces of mobility equipment for free. Wheelchairs will need checking in, but the airline will provide an airport wheelchair to use until you are on the plane.

Many airlines will let you pre-book a seat on the plane, so you can choose one that is best for you. You may wish to book an aisle seat, or be close to the toilets. Some airlines will charge for pre-booking seats, so check their policy when you book your trip. This means you do not have to get a healthcare professional to fill in a Medical Information Form (see the next section for more details) for each journey you make, providing there is no change in your condition or need for assistance.

### **Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice (INCAD) and Medical Information Form (MEDIF)**

Before you fly, an airline may ask you to complete an Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice (INCAD) or a Medical Information Form (MEDIF). You can fill in the INCAD form yourself, but a doctor has to fill in the MEDIF.

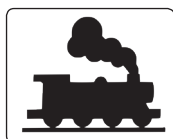
These forms can help airlines arrange the right assistance or equipment you may need during your flight. They can also help the airline assess if you are fit to fly.

People with stable, long-term conditions do not usually need to complete an INCAD or MEDIF. But you should contact the airline you are flying with as different airlines have different policies about who they carry.

If you are asked to complete an INCAD or MEDIF and are medically cleared to fly, the clearance will only be valid for one journey.

## **Airport transfers**

Once you have reached your destination, you will need to arrange to get from the airport to your accommodation. It may be useful to find out how long this transfer will be and what type of transport it will involve – a coach, train or taxi, for example. If you need a taxi, try to book one in advance and be clear about your needs. But it is worth remembering that in many areas, accessible taxis may not be available.



### **I'm travelling by train. Is help available if I need it?**

Eurostar provides free assistance for passengers who need it at any Eurostar terminal. You can arrange this when you book your trip, or 48 hours in advance of your journey. If you are travelling to an airport or ferry terminal by train, the National Rail website has information about accessibility at stations and how to arrange journey assistance.

## **Is my Blue Badge valid in Europe?**

A Blue Badge can sometimes be used to park closer to a destination than parking rules would normally allow, and may give the user additional rights.

It can be used in all European countries, but ask your motoring organisation about the rules in advance of travel, as the rules vary from country to country.

The Department of Transport has produced a leaflet called Using a Blue Badge in the EU.

You can download or print this from the publications section of the government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blue-badge-using-it-in-the-eu>

If you are hiring a car abroad, make sure the rental company is fully aware of your needs and check the level of the standard insurance they offer. You may decide to extend the level of insurance.



### **I'm travelling by sea. How accessible are ships?**

Ships that sail more than 12 miles from the UK coastline are not covered by the Equal Opportunities Act. But many ships are accessible to passengers with limited or reduced mobility.

If you are planning to travel by sea, taking a cruise, for example, it's important to tell the cruise company about any special requirements you have at the time of booking. You should also tell them about any medical equipment or aids you will be bringing with you. If they know in advance, they can make suitable arrangements so that your needs are met. For example, you may be given a specific type of cabin on the upper deck that is more accessible than one on the lower decks.

### **How do I tell people I have Arthritis, Connective Tissue Diseases or Osteoporosis while I'm away, if I need to?**

Wearing a Medic Alert bracelet or pendant can be very helpful if you are not able to communicate in an emergency. It is a piece of jewellery that provides contact details and medical information, including what medications you are taking.

Google Translate- <https://translate.google.co.uk>

Google's free service instantly translates words, phrases, and web pages between English and over 100 other languages.

### **Healthy Travelling**

Travelling time is usually longer than you think, whilst we may think that a flight to Athens is 3 hours and 4 minutes, the amount of time you will be travelling may be longer e.g.

- Home to airport
- Airport waiting time
- Flight
- Arrivals in Athens
- Athens airport to final destination

### **Healthy habits before flying**

The key to staying healthy throughout your trip is to support your immune system with a healthy diet, exercise and high quality supplements before you travel.

- Stay well hydrated in the 2 days prior to travel by drinking plenty of water.
- Always try to get a good night's sleep the day before you fly.
- You should also get some exercise before a long flight, go for a walk and get some fresh air and sunshine (weather permitting of course) which will give your vitamin D levels a boost.
- Choose the best seat – It may be possible to pre-purchase an extra legroom seat before flying. Otherwise, in the hours leading up to the flight choose a moment to get your online check-in done and select your seat. You may want to research the best airline seat options for your class of travel.

- Stay relaxed at the airport. Get to the airport in good time. Remain calm during the check-in and security procedures. Once airside do try and take a walk around the terminal to stretch your legs immediately prior to flying.
- Don't forget to keep any essential medication with your hand luggage rather than in checked bags. Ensure that you have your pain killers (analgesia) and/or Non-Steroidal Inflammatory Arthritis –NSAIDS ready and close to hand if needed.
- Controlled Drugs- for more information about travelling with controlled drugs and medications that have traces of controlled drugs visit <https://www.gov.uk/travelling-controlled-drugs>. You will also need a letter from the GP or person who prescribed your medicine. You might need to show this at the border; the letter must include:
  - your name
  - what countries you're going to and when
  - a list of your medication, including how many you have
  - doses and the strength
  - the signature of the person who prescribed your drugs
- TENS Machine, you are allowed to carry onboard airplanes medical equipment, if it's essential for your journey, you may want to have a letter confirming this from your GP or Rheumatology Clinical Nurse Specialists. For more information <https://www.gov.uk/hand-luggage-restrictions/essential-medicines-and-medical-equipment>

### **During the Flight**

- If possible board last. If flying long-haul, be one of the last people to board in order to minimise the time you actually spend on the aircraft.
- Wear comfy clothing. Wear loose fitting clothing made from natural breathable fibres and dress in layers so that

you can adjust to the varying temperature. Loosen shoes on longer flights as ankles normally swell up a little. We would probably advise against taking off shoes and walking around in socks.

- Remember to keep hydrated, once on board, rule number 1 is to keep hydrated. Plane cabins can be very dry with humidity levels well under 20% – roughly equivalent to a tropical desert. It is important to drink plenty of fluids during your flight, so you do not become dehydrated. This is particularly important if you have low blood pressure.

Do Not refill water from taps in airplane toilets as there is a risk of E-coli and other germs being present in the aircraft's water tanks.

Try to drink water regularly throughout the entire flight, ideally about 1 litre every 4 hours (that's about a glass every hour). Avoid any drinks that can dehydrate you. That means no carbonated sodas, no alcohol and no caffeine (coffee and black tea). If you desperately need caffeine shot then try green tea instead.

- Drink herbal tea – Consider bringing your own herbal tea bags on board and asking the flight attendant for some hot water. Better still bring an empty thermos flask and fill up at an airport café before flying.
- Moisturise. Keep your face moisturised by using a mist sprayer or perhaps coconut oil, jojoba oil or a high quality natural face cream. Lip balm can also keep lips moist. If you have sinus issues then bring a nasal saline spray.
- Eat lightly on board. Don't overeat and avoid any sugary and starchy foods. Alternatively, eat a healthy, light meal on the ground before the flight – avoid junk food or any foods that gives you gas such as beans, corn, chick peas, cabbage, lentils or onions. In the air bodily gases expand by a third and the digestion process slows down.

- Keep moving during the flight. During the flight walk up and down the aisle at least once every hour if you can – getting an aisle seat will make this more convenient.

Most airlines have a range of exercises to follow which can help your blood circulation. Check the in-flight magazine or entertainment system to find them. Beneficial exercises include lifting your calves, rotating your ankles, tensing and relaxing various muscles and doing gentle stretches. Try not to cross your legs for prolonged periods.

- Flight stockings. You may also choose to wear special compression stockings to further reduce your chance of developing deep-vein thrombosis (DVT) and blood clots. For more information out DVT visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/deep-vein-thrombosis-dvt/>
- Keep your hands clean. Wash your hands and fingernails regularly with soap and water. Consider also using an antiseptic sanitiser gel. Natural brands without chemicals are available.

Try to avoid any unwashed hand contact with your mouth, nose and eyes. Be aware that bacteria are present on many surfaces in an aircraft that people regularly touch. This obviously includes the toilet and toilet door handles – but also seats, armrests, seat trays, seat pockets, entertainment screens and controls, in-flight magazines etc. It could even include the airline blankets and pillows which are wrapped in plastic.

Use a paper towel or tissue to turn off taps and open door handles after using the toilet. Some people may want to bring antibacterial wipes to clean surfaces around their seats.

- Turn on the air vent. People infected with colds and viruses can spread germs on the plane, particularly around neighbouring seats. To help deflect germs, turn on the overhead air vents to a medium flow and point the air to just in front of your face.



- Reduce motion sickness. If you suffer from motion sickness then book a (window) seat near the wing and avoid the back of the plane.
- Help your ears. During the descent the rapid increase in air pressure can be painful for your ears. Help keep your Eustachian tubes open by swallowing, sucking a sweet, yawning or chewing gum. Or use the well known Valsalva manoeuvre by pinching your nose and blowing gently through it while closed.

### **Healthy habits post-flight**

- In the hours after arrival make sure to go outside for a walk in fresh air.
- At the end of your post-flight arrival day prioritise on getting a good night's sleep! Following some of the above tips will hopefully ensure that you have a healthy flight



### **Sun Protection**

A number of Rheumatology medications are considered to cause photosensitive to one degree or another. We recommend take sensible precautions in the sun, but you should not need to avoid the sun altogether (and sunshine is our main source of vitamin D, which is essential for healthy bones).

The following advice from the NHS website on Sun Safety can help you to stay safe in the sun, especially if you are at a higher risk of sunburn due to photosensitive medication:

- Spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm
- Make sure you never burn
- Aim to cover up with a t-shirt, hat and sunglasses
- Remember to take extra care with children
- Use factor 15+ sunscreen

Remember, you can burn just as easily in your garden as you can on a beach, but hopefully these simple rules will help to prevent that from happening wherever you spend your summer.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/sunscreen-and-sun-safety/>



### **Food and Water**

Contaminated food and water often pose a risk for travellers. Many of the holiday illnesses and infectious diseases can be associated with contaminated food and water. These infections/ toxins and parasites can potential enter the body by:



- Eating and swallowing them
- Inhaling aerosols
- Contact with contaminated water- including natural freshwater, marine water, or the water in inadequately treated swimming pools, water playgrounds (splash parks or splash pads), or hot tubs and spas.

These infections can cause diarrhea, vomiting, or infection of the ears, eyes, skin, or the respiratory or nervous system.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/food-and-water-abroad/>

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2018/the-pre-travel-consultation/food-water-precautions>

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### **More information and support:**

#### **Association of British Insurers:**

Provides general information on insurance and savings products and services.

[www.abi.org.uk](http://www.abi.org.uk)

**Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA):**

The UK's leading travel association.

Tel: 020 3117 0599 (Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm)

[www.abta.com](http://www.abta.com)

**European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)**

To apply for a card:

Tel: 0300 330 1350 (Automated service)

[www.ehic.org.uk](http://www.ehic.org.uk)

For more information tel: 0191 218 1999

**European Health Insurance Card Overseas Healthcare Team**

To apply for a refund:

Tel: 0191 218 1999 (Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm)

**Eurostar (Passenger assistance):**

Assistance should be arranged at least 48 hours before you travel.

Tel: 08432 186 186

**Flying with Disability:**

The website is designed to provide information and advice to disabled people who travel by air.

[www.flying-with-disability.org](http://www.flying-with-disability.org)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Government department's website has advice, information and tips about foreign travel.

[www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

**MedicAlert:**

Provides medical ID jewellery and keeps secure, detailed medical records that can be accessed in an emergency.

Tel: 0800 581 420 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

[info@medicalalert.org.uk](mailto:info@medicalalert.org.uk)

[www.medicalalert.org.uk](http://www.medicalalert.org.uk)

**Mobility Equipment Hire Direct:**

Hires a range of mobility equipment and aids for breaks in the both the UK and to various overseas destinations.

0800 644 6062 or 0141 248 3993

sales@mobilityequipmenthiredirect.com

www.mobilityequipmenthiredirect.com

**National Rail:**

Provides information about accessibility at stations and how to arrange journey assistance.

0845 748 4950

www.nationalrail.co.uk

**Parkat:**

Offers advice and information for disabled passengers and those with restricted mobility through UK airports.

support@parkat.co.uk

www.parkat.co.uk

**Tourism for All:**

This organisation is an expert on accessible tourism, both in the UK and internationally.

Tel: 0845 124 9971

info@tourismforall.org.uk

www.tourismforall.org.uk

**Visit our website at [www.porthosp.nhs.uk](http://www.porthosp.nhs.uk)**

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