

PARKINSON'S AND TRAVELLING

A person with Parkinson's (PD) may face challenges while travelling because of changing mobility and energy levels and special concerns relating to medication. The following points can help you plan for a safe and memorable travel experience. *Don't let PD hold you back from the trip of your dreams!*

The Planning Stage:

Make a **detailed list** of what you need to take well in advance. Strategies for feeling well and managing stress:

- Plan your trip within a realistic assessment of your stamina and overall health.
- Whenever possible, travel with a companion and avoid the busiest travel times.
- Be prepared for the stress of travelling to possibly make symptoms temporarily worse.
- Plan for coping with possibly having an 'off' period at a critical point, such as a customs line, airline check-in or other busy places.
- Rest the day before and the day after your trip – 'overdoing it' can worsen PD symptoms.
- Remember: Some last-minute changes or travel interruptions are beyond your control.

- See your doctor before you depart:
 - Ask your doctor for a letter explaining that you have PD (and other conditions if appropriate), medications, potential complications and your doctor's phone number.
 - Ask your doctor for the name of a doctor in the area where you are travelling.
 - 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.

- Specialized travel planning:
 - Consider planning your trip with a travel agent who specializes in working with people with disabilities. Schedule extra time into your plans.
 - Research the airline and hotel policies and regulations regarding accommodations for people with disabilities.

- Some things you might need:
 - In addition to a Parkinson Society Southwestern Ontario Medication Card, consider creating 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..."
 - Consider taking a travel dictionary to learn how to ask for medical and other help and how to describe PD 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 carry-on baggage. Do not keep them in checked baggage!
- 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 pillbox, 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.
- Complete and carry a Medication Card. Ask a travelling companion to carry a duplicate.

Getting the Help You Need

- Don't hesitate to make your needs known.
- Be specific and clear when describing PD. Many service providers will not understand the medical terms relating to PD 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.

Packing

- Pack light and use a "fanny" pack or backpack so that you have both hands free.
- 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 travelling companion, make a duplicate record for them to carry.
- 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 rooms that are modified. These are often called 'accessible rooms.' Consider booking these and call ahead to find out what features are available, e.g., grab bars in bathrooms, roll-in shower, etc. 'Accessible' does not mean the same thing in every place.
- When making hotel reservations, request a room on the ground floor or near an elevator.

Travel by Air

- 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, rather than public, checkpoint screenings.
- With 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.

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 the 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.

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 Society Southwestern Ontario gratefully acknowledges Parkinson Society British Columbia for sharing their resources and information.

Sources:

Guide to Living with Parkinson's Disease, www.epda.eu.com

Parkinson's Disease: Making Travelling Easier, www.webmd.com

Parkinson's Onboard: Travelling with PD. National Parkinson Foundation, www.parkinson.org

PSBC gratefully acknowledges members of the Abbotsford Support Group for their assistance with this help sheet.

“Sit and Stretch”

Whether you are travelling by plane, train or car, it is important to stretch your muscles. Fortunately, you can stretch even in crowded spaces.

Stretching Helps

- To reduce the tightness that you may feel in your legs, back and neck if you sit too long
- To reduce blood ‘pooling’ in your feet which can cause leg swelling
- To reduce some of the stiffness and cramping associated with Parkinson’s

Use caution!

- Remember to stretch slowly – at least 10 seconds for each stretch.
- Avoid bouncing.
- Repeat each stretch 3 to 5 times.
- Listen to your body and reduce the stretch if you feel pain.



Some Simple Tips

- If you are on a plane or train, get up and walk up and down the aisle once an hour, if you are able.
- If you are driving, pull over and get out of the car to stretch and get some fresh air on extended trips. This will keep you more alert and less stressed.
- Breathe! This helps relax your body and mind, as well as relieving tension in your shoulders and neck. Breathe in slowly, hold your breath briefly and breathe out slowly.
- If your muscles feel tight, it is time to stretch.
- 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.
- Drink plenty of water.

Exercise During Flight

(adapted from Quantus.com)

All of the following exercises are intended to be done while sitting in your seat on a plane.

Ankle Circles

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

Foot Pumps

- Start with both heels on the floor and point toes upward as high as you can.
- Put both feet flat on the floor then lift heels high, keeping balls of feet on the floor.
- Repeat in a continuous motion and in 30-second intervals.

Knee Lifts

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

Neck Roll

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

Shoulder Roll

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

