

Traveling with COPD

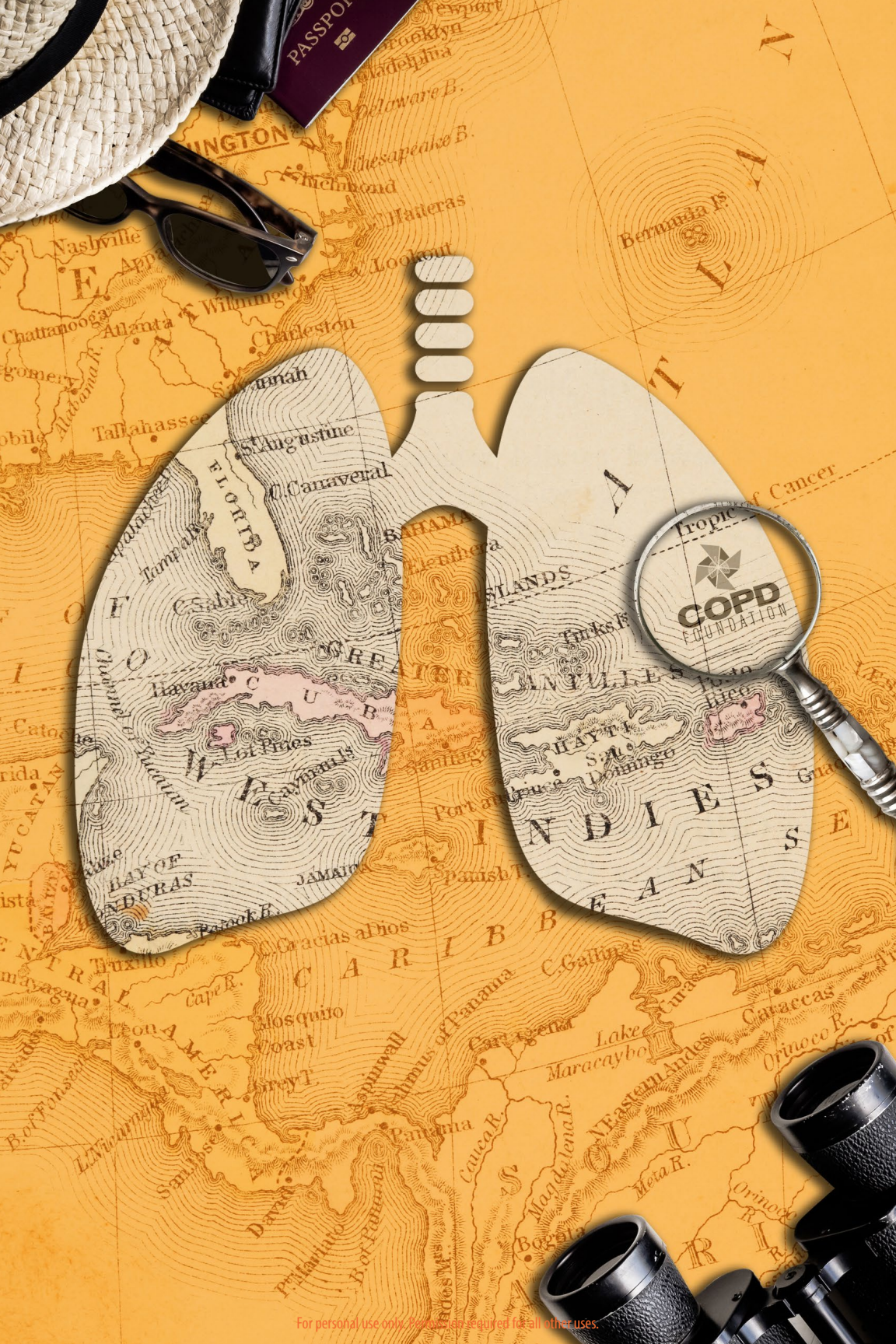
Breathe Easy and See the World



COPD
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Having chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) does not mean you have to give up traveling. People with COPD can still take vacations, visit friends and family, and see the world. It may take some extra planning, but you can still go on safe, healthy, and fun trips while managing your COPD. In this guide, you will learn helpful tips about traveling by car, airplane, train, and cruise ship, as well as traveling with supplemental (extra) oxygen.



BASIC TRAVEL TIPS FOR EVERYONE WITH COPD

If you're thinking about traveling, talk with your health care provider about where you're going, how long you will be gone, and if you will be traveling by car, plane, or cruise ship. Talk to your health care provider about the conditions in the place you're visiting. Changes in weather and altitude can affect your COPD. You may need a plan in case of flare-ups or infections during your trip.

Preparing Your Medications

- Refill your prescription medications and make sure you have enough of your over-the-counter ones, too.
- Bring a few extra days' worth of all your medications in case of any travel delays.
- Pack your medications in your carry-on luggage. Keep them in their original containers. Never pack your medications in your checked luggage.

Preparing for a Health Emergency

Check that your health insurance will cover you while out of state or out of the country. You may need a temporary policy for travel.

Exposure to Air Pollution

Avoid driving during rush hours and try to avoid busy highways. Keep the windows up and use air conditioning in warm weather. Use the air recirculation feature in your car when you are driving behind trucks, in a tunnel, or in other crowded places.



Exposure to Allergens

If you have allergies, check if you will be traveling through areas with those allergens. Try to avoid your allergens if possible.



BEFORE YOU TRAVEL WITH OXYGEN

If you're traveling with oxygen, you'll need to plan ahead.

First, contact your local supplier.

Contact your oxygen supplier at least two weeks before you leave. They can help you find an oxygen supplier at your destination in case you need more oxygen during your trip.

If you plan to stay in a hotel and use oxygen:

Call the hotel and tell the staff about your oxygen needs. If equipment will be delivered to your hotel, explain that an employee may need to sign for it and store it in a safe location away from hot areas or open flames. Ask for the oxygen to be delivered to your room once you check in.

If you're traveling by car with oxygen:

- If you use oxygen tanks, make sure you have enough to last throughout your trip.
- Ask your oxygen supplier where you can have empty tanks exchanged for full ones.
- Take your stationary concentrator with you for use at night.
- Some portable oxygen concentrators can be plugged into your car's electrical system.
- Secure your extra oxygen tanks in your car so they don't roll or bang into each other during driving.
- Never leave oxygen tanks in a hot car or loose in the trunk.



If you're traveling by cruise ship with oxygen:

- Call your cruise line four to six weeks before your trip and tell them you will be using oxygen.
- You may need to make your own arrangements for oxygen to be delivered to the ship.
- You may need to bring a letter from your health care provider saying that you may travel. This letter should include a list of your current medications as well as your oxygen needs. Avoid being in the smoking areas of the ship or around open flames while using oxygen.

If you're traveling by train with oxygen:

- Check with your train line to make sure your oxygen equipment is within their weight requirements.
- Oxygen concentrators must be able to run on battery power for up to 12 hours, so bring enough batteries for your entire travel time, plus an extra 20 percent in case of travel delays.
- Most companies require advance notice when passengers will be bringing oxygen on their trains. Give at least a few days' notice before traveling.





If you're traveling by plane with oxygen:

- If you need to use oxygen on the plane, you must take your own supply. Passengers cannot use the plane's oxygen masks. They are only used if the plane loses cabin pressure.
- Portable oxygen concentrators (POCs) can be used by people who need to use oxygen on airplanes. Many POCs can deliver up to 6 liters per minute (lpm). Some only deliver oxygen when you breathe in, which helps to conserve (not waste) your oxygen supply.
- When choosing a POC, make sure that it is on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved list, which can be found on their website: https://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/cabin_safety/portable_oxygen/.
- Your health care provider will need to fill out a form from the FAA website before you can fly with your POC.
- Once you have your POC, call the airline's health desk and tell them which brand it is and the liter flow you plan to use in-flight. If you use oxygen during your flight, airlines may charge you an additional fee for each leg of your trip.

On the day of your trip:

- Carry all necessary paperwork onto the plane along with oxygen equipment.
- If your POC uses batteries, bring enough to last the entire flight plus an additional ½ of the flight time in case of delays.
- Keep your charging equipment with you in your carry-on bag.
- The flight attendant may change your seat assignment because POCs are commonly used in the window seat.

TRAVELING BY PLANE: TIPS FOR EVERYONE WITH COPD

Even if you don't use oxygen, traveling by plane requires some advance planning. When traveling by plane you must plan for:

Changes in Altitude

Airplane cabins are pressurized. This means there is less oxygen in the cabin air during a flight. This may cause some people with COPD to feel short of breath, dizzy, or tired. Some people with COPD may need to use oxygen during their flight.

Studies show that if your oxygen level is 95% or above, you will not need supplemental oxygen during air travel. If your levels are between 88% and 92%, it is more likely that your health care provider will recommend you use supplemental oxygen. If your levels are between 92% and 95%, you may need to undergo testing to see if you'll need oxygen while flying. Your health care provider may order a breathing test called a high-altitude simulation test (HAST), which mimics the pressurized plane cabin and measures how well your lungs adapt at that altitude. This test can help your health care provider to decide if you will need to use supplemental oxygen on your trip.

Using a Wheelchair

Consider using a wheelchair in the airport. It can be a long walk to your gate. Before you fly, ask the airline's health desk for a wheelchair and attendant. They may also offer you a ride on a motorized cart.



Reducing the Risk of Infections In-flight

The air in a plane can be dry and the cabin can be crowded. This can increase your risk of a lung infection. To reduce your chance of infection while flying:

- Drink plenty of water and avoid coffee, tea, and alcohol. These drinks can cause dehydration.
- Ask to change seats if you are near someone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Consider wearing a mask during the flight.
- Wash your hands frequently, use alcohol-based hand sanitizing gel, or use hand sanitizing wipes.
- Wipe your tray table and arm rests with disinfecting wipes.

Remember, You Can Travel with COPD!

With any type of travel, always discuss your plans with your health care provider ahead of time. Planning ahead will help you have a safe and healthy trip. COPD does not have to stop you from traveling. With a little extra planning, you can relax and enjoy your vacation!

When traveling by plane, be sure to stretch your legs, do some light leg exercises, and/or wear compression stockings to reduce your risk of blood clots. People with COPD have a higher risk of blood clots and must be extra careful when traveling.



RESOURCES

To ask questions of others with COPD who have experience traveling, and for more information on traveling with COPD, visit our online community, COPD360social at www.COPD360social.org

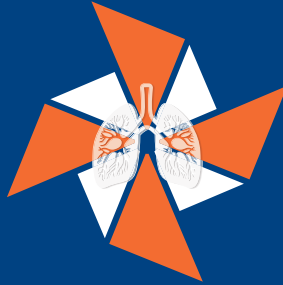
Learn more about traveling with COPD on the COPD Foundation website at copdf.co/traveling

For information designed to help you manage your COPD and thrive with this condition, please visit The COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living at copdf.co/guides Click on “register” for free access.

Transportation Security Administration "What Can I Bring?"
<https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/all>

NOTES

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COPD360 Community Support Line:
1-866-316-COPD (2673)

Bronchiectasis and NTM Information Line:
1-833-411-LUNG (5864)

This guide has been reviewed by members of the
COPD Foundation Guides for Better Living Review Team