

FLYING AND LUNG DISEASE

22 January, 2016

Many people with chronic lung disease are keen to fly for holidays and to visit friends and family.

There is often an assumption that there will be no problem flying. However the oxygen pressure in a commercial airliner is less than on the ground and can be as low as 14% while on the ground it is 21%. As such patients with borderline lung function may find they are breathless while flying and be put in a precarious situation. Equally patients needing oxygen at ground level may need much greater oxygen flow while flying.

The best way to assess what will happen is to have an altitude test before flying. If you need oxygen for the flight, airlines need to know at least 2 weeks before and your doctor needs to fill out paperwork that you need to submit. You may also want to check the policy of the various airlines to determine which one will be most willing to assist you. As such it would be sensible to be thinking about all of this a good couple of months prior to flying.

Oxygen can be delivered by the planes oxygen system, by a cylinder located often in the seat next to you or by your own portable oxygen concentrator which can be purchased or rented for your travels.

Other matters to consider are walking distances at airports and whether you might need assistance.

What puffers to take on board and do you need a nebuliser in which case highly portable nebulisers are available.

A more detailed summary is available from the LIFE support group (see Useful Links) and it also available on this site as well.

The Lung Health Clinic can arrange altitude testing for you.

For more details on how to plan your trip that involves flying, refer to the fact sheet 'Flying with Oxygen'.

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