



AIR TRAVEL: MANAGING YOUR MOBILITY EQUIPMENT INFORMATION SHEET

This information sheet contains information on air travel and your mobility equipment for people with spinal cord injury (SCI) or cauda equina syndrome (CES) whilst flying. It explains how your equipment is handled at an airport and what you can do to reduce the risk of damage or loss of your equipment.

Good planning and preparation are important to make your journey as smooth as possible. There may be many processes to follow. SIA are keen to encourage everyone to travel by air if they want to. When planning your air travel it is important to think about your mobility equipment and how it might be handled at an airport. Use the information that is specific to your needs.

This is the third Air Travel information sheet in this series. For more useful advice, hints and tips see: 1 - Preparation, booking and assistance, 2 - At the Airport, and 4 - Managing your Health.



MANUAL WHEELCHAIR USER

You will need to inform the airline that you need to take your wheelchair up to the gate. You are allowed to stay in your own wheelchair until you board the plane. The airline will ask for the make and model of your chair and the measurements. These can all be found on the manufacturer's website.

When you are at the plane you will need to transfer out of your wheelchair onto an aisle chair to get on the plane (insert link to factsheet 'Getting through the airport/subsection on aisle chairs'). You should take off any removable parts from your wheelchair so there is less risk of them being damaged or getting lost, for example, arm rests, side guards and foot plates. These can all be stored in the hold. It can be useful to attach a document to the back of your wheelchair which shows how it can be folded up and put back together. This can be used by staff at the airport. Use pictures or photos to show any buttons or working parts. This will help in other countries where airport staff may not speak English. You could also give instructions in the language of the country you are visiting (use a translation app). Be confident in telling staff how to handle your equipment.

We would suggest taking a wheelchair toolkit and spare inner tube/puncture repair kit in your hold luggage for repairs/maintenance when you're away (see wheelchair maintenance information sheet).

It might be worth researching places that could repair your wheelchair at your destination, in case it gets damaged.

Air Tags can be helpful to track your wheelchair. This can give peace of mind, that your wheelchair has been stored on the plane and that it has arrived at your final destination.



POWERED WHEELCHAIR USER

You will need to inform the airline in advance that you will be travelling in your powered wheelchair up to the gate. You are allowed to stay in your own wheelchair until you board the plane. The airline will ask for the make and model of your chair and the measurements. They will also talk about the type of battery it uses. These can all be found on the manufacturer's website.

You will need to transfer out of your powered wheelchair to get on board the plane. An aisle chair or a hoist might be used for you (see our other information sheets on Air Travel).

Before boarding you need to take off any removable parts from your wheelchair so there is less risk of them being damaged or getting lost, for example, arm rests, side guards and foot plates. These can all be stored in the hold. Your wheelchair power (the battery) will need to be disconnected before being loaded into the hold of the aircraft. A copy of the owners manual will show how to do this. It can be useful to attach a document to the back of your wheelchair with step by step instructions on how it can be folded up and put back together and how to disconnect the battery. This can be used by staff at the airport. Use pictures or photos to show any buttons or working parts. This will help in other countries where airport staff may not speak English. You could also give instructions in the language of the country you are visiting (use a translation app). Be confident in telling staff how to handle your equipment. For more information on battery types see the Powered Wheelchair information sheet.

TOP TIP!

Devices such as Air Tags can be helpful to track your wheelchair so you can locate it. This can give peace of mind, that your wheelchair has been stored on the plane and that it has arrived at your final destination.



WALKING AIDS

You will be able to take walking aids such as sticks, elbow crutches and walking frames up to the gate if you need to use them to get around the airport.

Walking sticks and crutches, are able to be stored in the aircraft cabin, so can be taken on the plane. Walking frames are more likely to be put in the hold, so you will be able to take them to the plane doors. If your walking frame can fold, they can sometimes be stored in the cabin.

Check with each individual airline as it will depend on the aircraft size and their policies.

You can buy folding walking sticks which can be useful when travelling as they are compact and easy to store when not being used.



CUSHIONS

We would recommend you remove your cushion from your wheelchair and sit on it during the flight to reduce the risk of any damage to your skin while you sit in the aircraft seat.

Think about how the flight could affect your cushion. Air based cushions, such as a ROHO cushion, may be affected by the changes in air pressure. It is important you know how to check the inflation level of your cushion (how much air is in your cushion) and adjust it as needed (add more air or remove air). Remember to take the pump with you to do this.

Different temperatures/climate at your destination can also affect your cushion, for instance, gel cushions become more fluid in the heat and more solid in cold temperatures.

For more information on cushions and cushion maintenance see our wheelchair maintenance information sheet.

OTHER EQUIPMENT

Larger pieces of equipment such as beds, mattresses and shower chairs can often be hired for your holiday. Check with your travel provider or hotel to see if they can assist you with this. If you are a frequent traveller, you may prefer to buy specific travel equipment such as a folding shower chair which will be provided with a travel bag for protection.

Remember medical equipment is not included in your airline weight allowance but you must tell the airline what equipment you are taking so they can plan where/how it will be stored on the aircraft.

STORING IN THE HOLD

Depending on the type of plane, your wheelchair may be loaded into a separate container to go in the hold, as shown below. In other aircrafts, it is loaded directly into the hold but will be placed in last.

Example: metal aircraft container with a folded wheelchair being strapped down in it by a member of airport staff.



FURTHER INFORMATION

[Mobility Hire](#)

[Mobility Equipment Hire Direct](#)

[Mobility at Sea](#)



For more information, visit our [Travel Hub](#) or contact us at:

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