

Adult Congenital Cardiac Service

AIR TRAVEL: A Guide for Congenital Heart Patients

Travelling by commercial airliners is safe for the great majority of patients with congenital cardiac conditions.

Nevertheless, there are some things you should know that will make air travel as safe as possible for you.

This guide explains how to make air travel safer and discusses special considerations that may apply to you.

-  Different heart conditions have different implications for flying. If you are unsure, you should always talk to your cardiologist – he or she will be able to advise you about any particular considerations that apply to you.
-  Everyone has a small risk of forming blood clots in the legs, particularly during long flights. For some congenital heart patients the risk may be higher. You can minimise this risk by:
 - Doing the leg exercises that the airline will explain
 - Taking regular walks around the cabin, at least every hour
 - Drinking adequate amounts of fluid, but avoiding alcohol and excessive tea or coffee
-  If you are considering taking aspirin prior to flying, discuss this with your cardiologist first. For some patients, the risk of aspirin may outweigh the benefits.
-  The amount of oxygen that you breathe in is lower at cruising altitudes because of the lower air pressure in the cabin. For most patients this is not a problem.

Patients who are cyanosed (blue) may sometimes need to have extra oxygen available by mask from an oxygen cylinder. This can usually be arranged with the airline, but it is advisable to give them plenty of warning. The airline may make a charge for this.
-  Remember to take out travel insurance that covers you for medical bills associated with your pre-existing heart condition, just in case you get unwell and need medical attention while you are overseas.
-  Remember to take adequate supplies of your medications with you when you go away. Some medications may not be available at your destination, or may be expensive to buy.
-  If you will be travelling overseas and you have a serious or risky congenital heart condition, it may be helpful to identify an expert adult congenital cardiologist at your destination. We can help you do this, or you can access the International Society for Adult Congenital Cardiac Disease website (click on www.isaccd.org) and look up the membership list.
-  Always carry your ACHD clinic card, which shows your diagnosis and the Adult Congenital Service contact numbers. It is also worth getting a copy of a recent clinic letter in case you need to seek medical help overseas.

FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE OR QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT:

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