

FITNESS TO FLY

This document, from British Airways, outlines medical aspects and recommendations regarding flying.

Passengers with disabilities

- If you have a stable disability, you do not require formal clearance.
- Wheelchair assistance can be provided on request at no extra charge.
- You should make your requirements known to British Airways when you make your reservation.
- You must be able to look after your own needs during the flight; this includes eating, transferring from wheelchair to seat, and going to the toilet.
- Cabin crew will do what they can to assist you in-flight; for example they will help you to the toilet door with the in-flight wheelchair on longhaul routes but they cannot lift you or assist you inside the toilet cubicle.
- If you can't manage on your own then you will need to travel with an able-bodied escort who is willing to help you.
- If you have a stable condition and do a lot of travelling with British Airways, you can apply for a Fremec card through the British Airways Passenger Medical Clearance Unit, outlining your specific request, which will avoid the need to make special arrangements each time you travel.
- [More information for additional needs passengers is available from the www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)

Medical clearance and fitness to fly

Most people with existing medical conditions are able to fly on a commercial aircraft without difficulty. However in-flight the cabin air is pressurised and precautions are sometimes needed if you have a respiratory or heart problem.

Medical clearance is required when:

- fitness to travel is in doubt as a result of recent illness, hospitalisation, injury or surgery
- you have an existing unstable medical condition
- special services such as oxygen or the use of medical equipment on-board is needed
- you are travelling for medical reasons or treatment

We strongly recommend that you check any vaccination requirements at least six weeks before you fly and ensure that you have adequate travel insurance to cover any medical costs should you become ill whilst you are away from home.

Most medical cases are straightforward but others require individual assessment. In some cases, we may ask that you travel with a medical escort or with supplementary oxygen (for which a charge is made).

We, in common with most airlines, assess your fitness to fly based on internationally accepted criteria, the aim being to ensure that you have a safe, comfortable and uneventful journey.

- [Download more information on fitness to fly from the World Health Organisation \(PDF - 84 KB\) from www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)

Passenger Medical Clearance Unit (PMCU)

If you are flying with British Airways and have a condition that may affect you in-flight, contact the PMCU. The PMCU deals with over 650 medical clearance cases every month and will be able to advise you, your doctor or other healthcare professionals about fitness to fly on all British Airways and associated aircraft. Final clearance can often be provided over the phone but if further information is needed, your doctor will be asked to complete a medical information form (Medif).

- [Download a Medif form \(PDF – 164KB\) from www.ba.com](#)

Contact PMCU on the following numbers:

Tel: +44 (0)20 8738 5444

Fax: +44 (0)20 8738 9644

Cabin environment

The aircraft cabin environment differs from that on the ground and this can have an effect on any health issues you may have.

- Modern commercial aircraft fly at an altitude of between 6000 and 8000 feet which means that the cabin air pressure is lower and the amount of oxygen in the blood can drop. This is not a problem for most people, but if you have respiratory problems (such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)) you may need to book supplementary oxygen. There is a charge for this and it can be arranged via the Passenger Medical Clearance Unit (PMCU).
- Any trapped gas in the body will expand which can lead to pain and perforation of the eardrum. If your sinuses are blocked then quite severe pain can result. This is often worse on landing than take off but can happen at both times.
- Cabin air is relatively dry which can lead to a sensation of dryness in the mouth, nose and eyes, though studies have shown that it does not lead to whole body dehydration.

Flying after an illness or an operation

You must be extra careful about flying if you've had an operation or a serious illness as travel can be stressful. It is wise not to travel if you don't feel up to it.

The following guide outlines the minimum time before it is advisable to travel if you have had some treatment or if you need to highlight your condition to us before travelling.

Pregnancy

Pregnant women can normally travel safely by air, but most airlines restrict travel in late pregnancy.

Typical guidelines for those who have an uncomplicated pregnancy are:

- after the 28th week of pregnancy a letter from a doctor or midwife should be carried, confirming the expected date of delivery and that the pregnancy is normal
- for single pregnancies, flying is permitted up to the end of the 36th week
- for multiple pregnancies, flying is permitted up to the end of the 32nd week.

Travelling after surgery

Type of surgery	Travel allowed after (number of days)
Major chest, abdominal or cranial surgery middle ear surgery	10 days
Cataract or corneal laser surgery, all other eye surgery	1 day
Introduction of gas into the eye for retinal detachment Tonsillectomy	6 days but Contact the PMCU*
Appendectomy or abdominal keyhole surgery	4 days
Heart conditions	
Angioplasty	If the procedure is straightforward you can usually fly after three to five days but you should discuss it with the PMCU.
Heart surgery	If you feel well enough and really need to fly you can travel after 10 days but four to six weeks is preferable. You should not fly within seven days of a heart attack and only then if it's essential (i.e. if you need to be repatriated from overseas). Ideally it's probably sensible to delay travel for up to four weeks or longer if there are any complications.
Heart attack	As long as you don't have frequent attacks, there is no restriction. Remember to take your medication into the cabin with you.
Angina sufferers	
Chest conditions	
Stable asthma	This is not usually a problem, as long as you take your inhalers with you.
Chronic bronchitis, emphysema or other forms of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	If you can walk (without extra oxygen) for 50 metres without getting breathless, you should be fit to fly. If you can't walk this far, you may be able to travel with supplementary oxygen. There is a charge for this and it must be booked in advance through the PMCU. We will need to discuss your condition with your doctor.
A pneumothorax (where the lung "deflates")	Has to be fully resolved for at least a week before flying but you must contact the PMCU if you've had one in the month before you fly.
Neurological conditions	
A stroke	If your symptoms are stable or improving and you feel well enough, you can travel after 3 days. Please talk to the PMCU if you have had a stroke within the last 10 days.
Epilepsy	You should not travel within 24 hours of a grand mal fit.
Ear conditions	
An ear or sinus infection	If there is any possibility that your sinuses or the tube between your middle ear and the back of your mouth (the Eustachian tube) are blocked, you should not fly until the condition is better. A blockage can cause severe pain, perforation of the ear drum or other long term damage. Under normal circumstances the air in your middle ear and sinuses is able to enter and escape, as it expands and contracts, without ie. when your ears pop. Due to the risk of swelling, if you have broken a bone and have been fitted with a plaster cast you cannot fly for 24 hours if you have a flight of two hours or less and 48 hours for longer flights. These requirements can be lifted in special circumstances following
A broken bone	

Travel allowed after (number of days)

Type of surgery

Anaemia	discussion between the PMCU. If you have a haemoglobin below 7.5g/dl, particularly if it is of recent onset, it must be discussed with the PMCU.
An infectious disease	The World Health Organisation prohibits an airline from carrying a passenger suffering from an infectious disease whilst they are contagious. Infectivity periods vary from illness to illness and further information can be obtained from your doctor or through the PMCU.
Travelling with a medical escort after a serious illness and injury	In some situations patients who are quite ill are able to travel with appropriate medical escorts, although we no longer carry stretchers on our mainline operations. We prefer such cases to be organised by a recognised medical assistance company because of the specialised nature of this work.

***Please contact the PMCU** if you have had gas introduced into the body after an operation or for treatment purposes and which hasn't been resolved. Air retained in body cavities expands in-flight.

Diabetes

As long as your **Diabetes** is stable there are no restrictions:

- if you are crossing time zones you may want to discuss how to manage your insulin regime with your healthcare professional
- insulin does not generally require refrigeration and the cabin crew are unable to look after it for you onboard
- it should be carried as hand baggage and not in the aircraft hold where it is possible that it may be frozen
- insulin and all other medicines should be identifiable, preferably in original packaging and you should also carry a prescription or a supporting written statement from your doctor to avoid problems with security and customs
- dispose of needles safely and not in seat pockets or toilets - sharps boxes are available on all flights on request from our cabin crew
- [Advice for Diabetics available at www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)

Notice for peanut allergy sufferers

British Airways does not include peanut products within aircraft meals or snacks in any cabin except on longhaul flights to/from the Far East where Peanut Satay may be included on the menu.

Please be aware that other passengers may bring their own peanut products on board.

Other types of nut may be included on the longhaul aircraft menu, for example as snacks in Club World and FIRST.

Travelling with medicines or medical equipment

- We advise you to carry the medication you may need during the flight in your hand baggage.
- We cannot refrigerate medication for you. If your medicines need to be kept cool, a cool bag or vacuum flask may be appropriate or you should discuss options with your pharmacist.
- If you are travelling with medical equipment you may need to let us know in advance, it will depend on the type of equipment in question (see below).
- Medical clearance is required for the use of most medical equipment including nebulisers (used in some cases of asthma) and ventilators, as we need to ensure that you are fit to fly.
- It is not possible to guarantee power supply on-board our aircraft, so equipment must be capable of being battery operated.

- In normal circumstances, medical equipment which has been authorised, can be used on board except during taxi, take off, approach and landing. Please contact the Passenger Medical Clearance Unit (PMCU).

Nebulisers

Battery operated nebulisers can be used in-flight with the exception of take off and landing. It is not possible to supply mains power and you need to notify the PMCU before you travel.

CPAP machine

- Medical clearance is not required for the carriage or use of CPAP machines, (which are used in the treatment of sleep apnoea, a condition associated with severe snoring) as fitness to travel will not be in doubt.
- CPAP machines can be plugged into a laptop power point, where available, with a suitable adaptor.
- Maximum power output from the laptop points is 75 Watts, and if your equipment draws more than this, the outlet will be automatically deactivated.
- We cannot guarantee that any of the laptop points will be serviceable. If you intend to use one in-flight, we prefer that you use a dry-cell battery operated device.

Travelling with a portable dialysis machine

In most circumstances you can take equipment with you. If it is likely that you will exceed normal baggage allowances, you should discuss it with Reservations or the PMCU in advance of travel and **well before** you arrive at the airport, otherwise you may be liable for excess baggage charges.

Medical equipment for use at your destination

Special arrangements exist for the carriage of essential medical equipment for use at your destination, such as portable dialysis machines. This can be arranged through your booking agent.