



Bullen.

A guide to **living with a stoma**


Travelling with a stoma



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Travelling with a stoma

One of the most common topics that those with a stoma often ask us about is travel, whether that's staying in the UK or flying off to some exotic location. Having a stoma doesn't limit your ability to travel but it may just take a little extra forward planning.

Before you travel

When you have a stoma there's a little more planning that needs to go into any trip away. After all, forgetting your stoma bags would really spoil your holiday!

Planning



A good suggestion is to take twice as many supplies as you would normally use. That will cover you if you find that you need to use more products due to heat, or a change in food or drink. If you take your products out of the packaging that they come in you will find them easier to pack and they'll take up less space in your suitcase.

You should check with your GP first, so that they are aware that you will be ordering more than usual, and you should also ensure that you place your order with your delivery company in plenty of time. Don't leave it until two weeks before you travel!

If you are visiting friends or family you could send some supplies out to them ahead of time. Or if you are a Bullen Healthcare customer you can speak to your personal advisor about having your supplies sent directly to your hotel.

Remember if you are travelling abroad, parcels can get held up by customs, so do ensure that you order with plenty of time to spare to allow for any unexpected delays.



Medication

If you are travelling with prescription medication then it is best to keep it in the original packaging with the pharmacy dispensing label on. You should also carry your repeat prescription with you, in case of any difficulties. Not all countries have the same rules as the UK on medication, in some countries medication that can be brought over the counter here is illegal. You should always check before you travel.

Travel Insurance

You will need a policy that covers pre-existing medical conditions and you need to declare all of your medical conditions to ensure that you are fully covered.

Global Health Insurance Card

If you are planning to travel within the EU then you can apply for a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) which has replaced the old European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC) post Brexit. If you still have an EHIC then you can continue to use it until it expires. The new GHIC acts in a similar way to the EHIC in that it allows you access to state-provided medical treatment except in Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein or Switzerland.

The GHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance and you should look to have both if travelling abroad. You can find out more more about the GHIC by visiting the NHS website [here](#).



Travel Certificate

Some people find it helpful to carry a travel certificate with them that explains that you have a stoma. These can be obtained from your home delivery company (Including Bullen Healthcare), your specialist nurse, or from one of the patient support charities. When going through security at the airport it is best to keep the certificate close to hand, for example in a pocket, in case you need it.



On the move

Whether you are travelling by plane, coach or train, or a combination of all of them, it is not uncommon to be concerned about the journey. Many people find that after that first trip they wonder what they were worried about.

Some people prefer to carry all of their supplies in their hand luggage, while others put some in their hand luggage and put the rest in their hold luggage. If you are travelling with other people it is worth splitting your supplies across the cases just in case one goes missing. Most of the airlines and tour companies will allow you an additional hand luggage allowance for medical supplies. You will need to contact the airline or tour operator in advance, and you may need to provide a letter from your GP to confirm what you are carrying.

Travelling by Coach

Whether you are on a scheduled service or an organised tour they should schedule stops at the motorway services, so remember to take your Radar key with you if you are in the UK and want to use the disabled toilets. Many coaches have toilets on-board, but these can be really small, so you might want to avoid having to change your stoma bag in one unless you really have to.



Travelling by Train

If you are travelling on a long distance train then you will normally be able to book a seat in advance and to choose where that is. This means that you can choose to sit in a carriage near the toilets, or to sit in an aisle seat if you are worried about your bag filling up. Some trains will have a disabled toilet on board and these are normally bigger than the normal train toilets, with room to move around in, so if you do need to change your bag on the train it can be worth walking through the train to the disabled toilet.

Travelling by Plane

People are often worried that their bag will inflate with air. This shouldn't happen as the air pressure inside the cabin is pressurised. If you are worried about your stoma bag, or leg bag filling then you might want to pre-book an aisle seat, or one nearer to the toilets.

Plane toilets work on a vacuum system, so don't use much liquid compared to a normal toilet. All that means is that emptying your stoma bag on board needs a little more thought than it does on the ground. The best way is to place some toilet paper into the bowl, empty your bag, and then finally have a wee. That way the suction should clear everything away in one go.



The myths and facts around travelling with a stoma

Will I get through security with my bag?

Most security personnel are trained to deal with passengers who have an invisible illness or disability such as a stoma. If the airport has a body scanner then your stoma bag will show up, but the normal scanners should not pick it up. Should they wish to **search** you then you are able to request that they do so in a private room.



Can I swim with a stoma?

Yes! You can swim in the sea or in the swimming pool with a stoma. Your bag shouldn't have any issues withstanding the water but if you are worried at all then pop on a couple of flange extenders around your bag for extra security.



Will the heat affect my bag?

It shouldn't, but some people find that the heat can sometimes affect the adherence of the bags so you may need to change it more often than if you were at home. Some people also find that the change in climate, food and drinks can also upset their tummy for a few days so it's best to be prepared.

Can I drink the water abroad?

It is always best to follow the advice from your medical team on how much you need to drink, but there are some general rules about tap water that everyone should follow. Tap water in Europe is considered safe to drink, and can also be used when cleaning your stoma, or for irrigation.

If you are in a country where it is not advised to drink the tap water, then you should also avoid ice that has been made with tap water, and avoid salads and similar food items that have been washed in tap water, and you should use bottled water for brushing your teeth, or for irrigation.

How to obtain extra medical allowance for a flight

Contact the 'special assistance services' number with the airline that you are flying with. They will be able to advise you if they offer any additional hand luggage to take medical equipment on board. Most airlines will make some allowance. It is down to the individual airline whether they charge for this extra hand luggage or whether they provide it for free.



Taking supplies and prescription medications on a flight



While the liquid restrictions for hand luggage is under 100mls, for essential medication you may carry more than 100mls providing you have the relevant documentation from your doctor. Airport staff may need to open the containers to screen the liquid at security.

It is worth contacting your airline if your medication involves needles and syringes as each individual airline will have their own set of rules of how these need to be stored and administered if required during the flight.

Most airlines will request you to carry a copy of your prescription and/or a doctor's note covering the medication. You may find it's easier to take adhesive remover wipes rather than sprays and pre-cut your stoma bags to avoid needing scissors.

Invisible disabilities sunflower lanyard scheme

The sunflower lanyard scheme is being rolled out across the airports and is designed to discreetly make airport staff aware that you are travelling with a hidden disability. This may then prompt staff to offer you extra assistance to make sure that travelling through the airport is as stress free as possible. It is not there to let you queue jump and will not get you through security any quicker. Staff may offer you extra help with your luggage and offer you assistance to help you on board your flight. Contact special assistance at the airport you are travelling through to see if they support the sunflower lanyard scheme.

Obtaining a RADAR key

If you are travelling around the UK then you can purchase a RADAR key for around £3, which opens around 9,000 accessible toilet facilities around the UK. The Irish Wheelchair Association have their own version of the key for Ireland and in Europe there is the Euro WC key, this mainly unlocks facilities in Germany, Switzerland and Austria.



Checklist

You can use this checklist to tick off things as you pack and make sure that you don't forget anything!

- ☐ Stoma bags/catheters
- ☐ Any accessory products you use i.e. adhesive remover
- ☐ Dry wipes
- ☐ Disposal bags
- ☐ Scissors (hold luggage only)
- ☐ Radar key (UK only)
- ☐ Bed pads
- ☐ Cooler bag to keep supplies in
- ☐ Medication
- ☐ Travel certificate
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Tickets
- ☐ Money

Can we help?

Why not give us a call today and speak to one of our friendly personal customer advisors and find out more about how Bullen Healthcare can help you get on with life with a stoma without any worries.

Call us on

Freephone 0800 031 5401

Visit us at

www.bullens.com/stoma-guide

Useful Links

Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

www.iasupport.org

Colostomy UK

www.colostomyuk.org

Urostomy Association

www.urostomyassociation.org.uk