

International travel and Parkinson's

This information sheet looks at how to plan your holiday, including preparing your medication, transport accessibility and getting medical treatment abroad.

All contact details for the organisations mentioned in this information sheet are listed in the 'More information and support' section on page 6.

What do I need to think about when planning a holiday?

Lots of people with Parkinson's travel – there should be no reason for the condition to stop you from enjoying trips abroad. If you're planning a break for yourself or someone else with Parkinson's, you may just need to do some extra planning to make sure the holiday meets your needs.

Think about what sort of holiday would suit your needs. For example, are you an independent traveller or would you prefer to take an organised tour? What type of accommodation would be best? Perhaps you would rather travel by rail than air.

It's a good idea to chat to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse (if you have one) about your plans. They can check if there's anything you need to take into consideration, such as how much medication you'll need.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office website has advice, information and tips about foreign travel. You may find this helpful when you are researching the country or countries you will be visiting.

How can I be clear about my needs when I book a trip?

When you book a holiday or travel, explain what you need clearly to your travel or booking agent. Be careful not to assume that people will understand what sort of assistance someone with Parkinson's may need.

The Association of British Travel Agents has a helpful checklist on its website for disabled and less mobile passengers. It can be completed by you or your travel agent. The information you provide can be used to check whether the transport, accommodation and facilities at your destination meet your needs.

What will make my stay on holiday more comfortable?

When you are booking accommodation, consider what your needs are. For example, can you manage stairs unaided? If you can't, you may want to check the accommodation has a lift, or ask for a ground floor room. Some hotels may also be able to offer rooms that have been specifically adapted for disabled people, which you may find useful. You should ask for written confirmation that what you have asked for is available when you book. Confirm the arrangements again with the hotel before you leave for your trip.

If you need certain equipment at the hotel during your stay, such as a wheelchair or a raised toilet seat, ask the place where you are staying if they can provide this. Where they can't, you may be able to hire equipment for the duration of your stay. Mobility Equipment Hire Direct provides equipment for hire, and can deliver to your hotel, apartment or villa on holiday, both in the UK and abroad.

If you are staying in accommodation where meals are provided, you may want to check how these are served. This can help you prepare for when you may need some help.

How can I prepare my medication before I travel?

Before you travel, ask your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse for a medical certificate or letter that explains you have Parkinson's and lists the medication you are taking. You might need this for when you go through customs or if you are taken ill.

If you are carrying syringes or needles, make sure your doctor explains why you need them in the medical certificate or letter they provide. Airports have very strict rules about taking sharp objects on board, so you may be asked why you are carrying them.

Ask your GP to provide you with a prescription for extra medication to cover the length of your trip. For example, if you are going on holiday for two weeks, take four weeks medication just in case. Also, check if you are able to get specific drugs in the country you are travelling to – the drug company should be able to advise you about this.

You may need to check with the embassy or High Commission of the country you are visiting to see if they have any restrictions on taking your medication into the country. Some medication may contain ingredients that are illegal where you are going to.

Always carry your medication in the original packaging and keep it in your hand luggage. If you are passing through security at an airport, it's useful to keep your medication together in a clear, sealable bag.

Will I need to have vaccinations?

Depending on where you are going, you may need vaccinations to protect you against certain diseases. Your GP will be able to advise you which ones you may need. Some are available on the NHS, but others you may need to pay for.

If you have any concerns about how vaccinations may affect your Parkinson's, you should talk to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse.

“ I struggle with carrying a tray, so I always check whether the meals in a hotel I'm staying in are served as a buffet. ”

Garth, diagnosed in 2009

Will I need to adjust my medication routine while I'm away?

If you are going abroad, you may need to alter your medication regimen – especially if you are travelling across time zones. Sometimes this may mean you need to take your medication at different times, but within the same hourly spread, or it may mean taking an extra tablet.

As everybody's medication regimen is different, it is very important you speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse. They will be able to help you work out the best way to take your medication while you are travelling and after you reach your destination.

What happens if I need medical treatment on holiday?

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) allows you to receive free or subsidised medical treatment in all European Economic Area (EEA) countries. This includes countries in the European Union (EU) as well as Iceland, Norway, Lichenstein and Switzerland. The card replaced the E111 certificate.

You can get the EHIC if you are normally resident in the UK and are British. You are also eligible if you are of EU/EAA or Swiss nationality. The card is valid for up to five years.

You can apply for an EHIC for free online or by calling the automated service.

The EHIC covers medical treatment you may need while you are on your trip. This includes any treatment that may be necessary for a chronic or pre-existing medical condition.

Not everything that would be free on the NHS is covered by the EHIC. But you should be able to get the same treatment as a resident of the country you are visiting receives. If you do have to pay anything towards your care, it may be possible to get a refund when you return to the UK. If you need to make a claim once you return to the UK, you should call the EHIC Overseas Healthcare Team.

The EHIC is not an alternative to travel insurance. It does not cover private medical healthcare or the cost of being flown back to the UK, for example. So it is important to have both a valid EHIC and a travel insurance policy when you travel.

Medical treatment outside Europe

The UK does have agreements with some countries outside Europe that may mean you are still able to receive healthcare in an emergency.

This treatment may be free of charge or you may have to pay a reduced rate. If you are charged for treatment, you will not be able to apply for a refund from the UK Government when you return home.

To get treatment, you will usually need to show your British passport and proof of residence, such as a driving license.

For more information about getting medical treatment outside Europe, you can visit www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcareabroad

Should I get travel insurance?

It is important to have a valid travel insurance policy before you go on holiday. It will cover any medical costs that the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) doesn't, such as private healthcare. It usually also covers non-medical emergencies, such as travel delays or the cost of replacing lost or stolen luggage.

Always check the level of cover a policy offers. If you have Parkinson's, make sure the policy covers pre-existing medical conditions. If you don't declare a medical condition and need to make a claim, your policy may be invalid.

When you buy your travel insurance policy, it's a good idea to shop around. Depending on how many trips you are planning to make in a year, a multi-trip policy may be cheaper than buying a single trip one each time you travel.

Think about buying travel insurance as soon as you have booked your holiday. You will then be covered between booking and the date you travel in case anything happens. Good travel insurance policies will cover the cost of cancelling your trip if you are unwell and can't go, for example.

If you are planning on taking any equipment or mobility aids with you, make sure they are insured for loss or damage. Standard travel insurance policies don't always cover these items. Your household insurance may provide cover for these items, or you may have to pay an extra premium.

I'm travelling by air. What do I need to consider before I fly?

By law it is illegal for an airline to refuse a booking on the grounds of disability. Airlines are also not allowed to refuse to allow a disabled person to board an aircraft when they have a valid ticket and reservation. This applies to any flight leaving an airport in the EU and to flights on European airlines arriving in the EU.

Most airlines can offer help if you need assistance, as long as they know in advance – normally 48 hours before your flight. Airlines can arrange a wheelchair escort to meet you from the car park, train station or taxi and take you through check-in. They can also arrange for you to be taken to your departure gate and boarded first. At your destination, you can be escorted off the plane and taken through passport control and customs.

Even if you don't usually use a wheelchair, you may want to consider arranging an escort at the airport. It can be particularly helpful on long flights or flights involving transfers.

You may want to call several airlines and compare the different levels of service offered before booking your trip. Ask what sort of assistance they can offer and if there are any added fees. They may also have some information on their website. EU regulations have made it compulsory for all large European airports to offer free assistance to older or disabled passengers.

If you are travelling with your own wheelchair or other aids, most airlines will carry two pieces of mobility equipment for free. Wheelchairs will need checking in, but the airline will provide an airport wheelchair to use until you are on the plane.

Many airlines will let you pre-book a seat on the plane, so you can choose one that is best for you. You may wish to book an aisle seat, or be close to the toilets. Some airlines will charge for pre-booking seats, so check their policy when you book your trip.

Frequent traveller's medical card

A frequent traveller's medical card is a free identification card, which airlines offer to passengers who have a long-term, but stable medical condition. It is useful for people who travel with the same airline regularly

and is accepted as proof of medical clearance to fly. This means you do not have to get a healthcare professional to fill in a Medical Information Form (see the next section for more details) for each journey you make, providing there is no change in your condition or need for assistance.

You should contact the airline you normally fly with or check their website to see how to apply for a card. You will be asked to fill in a form about your specific needs. This will give the airline a permanent record of your requirements. When you book future flights, you can give the airline your card number and arrangements can be put in place for the date of travel.

If you travel with a different airline to the one who issued your frequent traveller's medical card, you will need to check with the new airline if they will accept the card.

Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice (INCAD) and Medical Information Form (MEDIF)

Before you fly, an airline may ask you to complete an Incapacitated Passengers Handling Advice (INCAD) or a Medical Information Form (MEDIF). You can fill in the INCAD form yourself, but a doctor has to fill in the MEDIF.

These forms can help airlines arrange the right assistance or equipment you may need during your flight. They can also help the airline assess if you are fit to fly.

People with stable, long-term conditions do not usually need to complete an INCAD or MEDIF. But you should contact the airline you are flying with as different airlines have different policies about who they carry.

If you are asked to complete an INCAD or MEDIF and are medically cleared to fly, the clearance will only be valid for one journey.

Fluid intake

It is important to drink plenty of fluids during your flight, so you do not become dehydrated. This is particularly important if you have low blood pressure (postural hypotension). If the cabin crew are aware you have Parkinson's, they can make sure you are offered drinks throughout the flight.

Airport transfers

Once you have reached your destination, you will need to arrange to get from the airport to your accommodation. It may be useful to find out how long this transfer will be and what type of transport it will involve – a coach, train or taxi, for example. If you need a taxi, try to book one in advance and be clear about your needs. But it is worth remembering that in many areas, accessible taxis may not be available.

I'm travelling by train. Is help available if I need it?

Eurostar provides free assistance for passengers who need it at any Eurostar terminal. You can arrange this when you book your trip, or 48 hours in advance of your journey. If you are travelling to an airport or ferry terminal by train, the National Rail website has information about accessibility at stations and how to arrange journey assistance.

“ I find wheelchair assistance at airports particularly useful. I don't use a wheelchair normally, but find long passport and security queues difficult otherwise. ”

Karen, diagnosed in 2003

I'm travelling by car. Is my Blue Badge valid in Europe?

The Blue Badge scheme helps some people with Parkinson's if they have problems walking.

A Badge can sometimes be used to park nearer to a destination than parking rules would normally allow, and may give the user additional rights.

It can be used in all European countries, but ask your motoring organisation about the rules in advance of travel, as the rules vary from country to country.

The Department of Transport has produced a leaflet called *Using a Blue Badge in the EU*. You can download or print this from the publications section of the government's website, www.gov.uk

If you are hiring a car abroad, make sure the rental company is fully aware of your needs and check the level of the standard insurance they offer. You may decide to extend the level of insurance.

I'm travelling by sea. How accessible are ships?

Ships that sail more than 12 miles from the UK coastline are not covered by the Equal Opportunities Act. But many ships are accessible to passengers with limited or reduced mobility.

If you are planning to travel by sea – taking a cruise, for example – it's important to tell the cruise company about any special requirements you have at the time of booking. You should also tell them about any medical equipment or aids you will be bringing with you. If they know in advance, they can make suitable arrangements so your needs are met. For example, you may be given a specific type of cabin on the upper deck that is more accessible than one on the lower decks.

How do I tell people I have Parkinson's while I'm away, if I need to?

You may find it helpful to find out how to say you have Parkinson's in the language of the country you are visiting, in case of emergency. The European Parkinson's Disease Association has an online tool that allows you to translate the phrase "I have Parkinson's. Please allow me time. In case of emergency contact..." into 25 different languages. You can then print it out and keep it in your wallet or purse while you are away. You can find this tool at www.epda.eu.com/en/resources/pd-doc/en

Wearing a Medic Alert bracelet or pendant can be very helpful if you are not able to communicate in an emergency. It is a piece of jewellery that provides contact details and medical information, including what medications you are taking.

You may also want to carry a Parkinson's UK alert card, that tells people you have Parkinson's. It is a plastic card that you can keep in your purse or wallet in case of emergencies or when having difficulties with movement or communication. You can order an alert card for free, using the details on the back page of this information sheet.

More information and support

Association of British Insurers

Provides general information on insurance and savings products and services.
www.abi.org.uk

Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)

The UK's leading travel association.

020 3117 0599 (Monday–Friday, 10am–4pm)

www.abta.com

European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

To apply for a card:

0300 330 1350 (Automated service)

www.ehic.org.uk

For more information:

0191 218 1999

European Health Insurance Card Overseas Healthcare Team

To apply for a refund:

0191 218 1999 (Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm)

Eurostar (Passenger assistance)

Assistance should be arranged at least 48 hours before you travel.

08432 186 186

Flying with Disability

The website is designed to provide information and advice to disabled people who travel by air.

www.flying-with-disability.org

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The Government department's website has advice, information and tips about foreign travel.

www.fco.gov.uk

MedicAlert

Provides medical ID jewellery and keeps secure, detailed medical records that can be accessed in an emergency.

0800 581 420 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

info@medicalalert.org.uk

www.medicalalert.org.uk

Mobility Equipment Hire Direct

Hires a range of mobility equipment and aids for breaks in the both the UK and to various overseas destinations.

0800 644 6062 or **0141 248 3993**

sales@mobilityequipmenthiredirect.com

www.mobilityequipmenthiredirect.com

National Rail

Provides information about accessibility at stations and how to arrange journey assistance.

0845 748 4950

www.nationalrail.co.uk

Parkat

Offers advice and information for disabled passengers and those with restricted mobility through UK airports.

support@parkat.co.uk

www.parkat.co.uk

Tourism for All

This organisation is an expert on accessible tourism, both in the UK and internationally.

0845 124 9971

info@tourismforall.org.uk

www.tourismforall.org.uk

Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at **parkinsons.org.uk/nurses**

Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email **hello@parkinsons.org.uk**. We run a peer support service if you'd like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson's who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline to talk to someone about being matched with a volunteer.

Our helpline can also put you in touch with one of our local information and support workers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

We also have a self-management programme for people with Parkinson's, partners and carers. It is an opportunity to reflect on life with the condition, learn about self-management and think about the future. To find out if there is a group near you visit **parkinsons.org.uk/selfmanagement**

Our website **parkinsons.org.uk** has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at **parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou**

You can also visit **parkinsons.org.uk/forum** to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.

Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet:

Gillian Carey, Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist, University of Surrey and St Peter's Hospital Chertsey

Carrie-Ann Lightley, Information Service Manager, Tourism for All UK

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.



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If you have comments or suggestions about this information sheet, we'd love to hear from you. This will help us ensure that we are providing as good a service as possible. We'd be very grateful if you could complete this form and return it to **Resources and Diversity, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**. Or you can email us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**. Thanks!

Please tick...

- I have Parkinson's. When were you diagnosed?
- I'm family/a friend/a carer of someone with Parkinson's
- I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's

Where did you get this information sheet from?

- GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse
- Information and support worker
- Parkinson's UK local group or event
- Ordered from us directly
- Our website
- Other

How useful have you found the information sheet? (1 is not useful, 4 is very useful) 1 2 3 4

Have you found the publication easy to read/use? Yes No

Has this resource given you information that might help you manage your condition better?

- NA
- It hasn't helped
- It has helped a little
- It has helped a lot

What aspects did you find most helpful?

Were you looking for any information that wasn't covered?

Do you have any other comments?

If you would like to become a member of Parkinson's UK, or are interested in joining our information review group, please complete the details below and we'll be in touch.

- Membership
- Information review group (who give us feedback on new and updated resources)

Name

Address

Telephone Email

- What is your ethnic background? Asian or Asian British Black or Black British Chinese Mixed White British White other Other (please specify)

We're the Parkinson's support and research charity. Help us find a cure and improve life for everyone affected by Parkinson's.

Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's. If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **020 7932 1303** or visit our website at **parkinsons.org.uk/support**. Thank you.

Parkinson's UK

Free* confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**

Monday to Friday 9am–8pm, Saturday
10am–2pm. Interpreting available.

Text Relay **18001 0808 800 0303**

(for textphone users only)

hello@parkinsons.org.uk

parkinsons.org.uk

*calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at **parkinsons.org.uk/information-support**

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at **parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources** or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at **publications@parkinsons.org.uk**

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