

## Traveling With Cancer

Traveling, especially during the holiday season, may seem overwhelming to a person living with cancer. In addition to the usual travel headaches, especially around major holidays, there are important health issues to consider before leaving town.

The key to safe traveling is to think ahead and prepare for any special travel needs. This means talking with your doctor about your medical condition(s) to know whether it is safe for you to travel. If it is safe, discuss any limitations with the doctor (for example, no traveling by plane).

Consider these issues before finalizing your travel plans:

**Risk of infection.** If you are receiving chemotherapy, talk with your doctor about the potential risks of traveling before planning a trip in between treatments. Some people may find it difficult or frightening to seek emergency medical care when far from home (and perhaps in a foreign country) in the event that they develop a serious and potentially life-threatening side effect, such as a high fever, which is a sign of [infection](#) [1]. For many people, though, the risk of infection is low enough that your doctor may permit you to travel while receiving chemotherapy.

**Flying.** Some people with cancer may not be permitted to fly because oxygen levels and air pressure changes at high altitudes can be dangerous. For example, if you are at risk for developing increased swelling in the brain because of a brain tumor, your doctor may advise you not to fly. Also, avoid air travel for 10 days after surgery because it may bring gas into the body that may expand and cause pain and stretch the incision wound.

Changes in the air pressure during a flight can also trigger swelling in the arms, legs, or other parts of the body. This condition is called [lymphedema](#) [2] and occurs in those who have had lymph nodes removed.

**Risk of blood clots.** A person with cancer, particularly someone who has recently had surgery, is at a higher risk of having a blood clot. Because blood clots, also called thromboses, are potentially life-threatening, a person with cancer may not be able to take an extended trip that requires sitting for a long time. Airline passengers already have an increased risk of blood clotting associated with flying. Read the [American Society of Clinical Oncology's \(ASCO's\) recommendations on preventing and treating blood clots](#) [3].

**Energy level.** Some cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy, cause [fatigue](#) [4] during and after treatment. This fatigue may limit the length and pace of your trip. Often people want to schedule a trip to celebrate the end of treatment; however, you might consider delaying your trip until your energy level improves. It could make the difference between really enjoying your trip and being too tired to appreciate it.

**Sun exposure.** Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can make skin temporarily or permanently more sensitive to sun damage. Consider this fact if you are traveling to a beach destination or if you will be spending a lot of time outdoors. The sun also reflects off snow and can be harmful if your skin is left exposed. Most people are at the greatest risk of sun damage within hours or a few days after receiving certain chemotherapy drugs or types of radiation therapy. However, sometimes the reaction is delayed, so be sure to ask your doctor about what types of exposure to avoid. Learn more about [protecting your skin from the sun](#) [5].

**Vaccinations.** Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and steroid therapy sometimes weaken the immune system and may limit the use and effectiveness of vaccinations that are required to travel to some parts of the world. For example, people with weakened immune systems may be advised against receiving live vaccines, such as measles or yellow fever. Inactivated vaccines, such as hepatitis B and cholera, may also be less effective. Talk with your doctor about your vaccination options if you must travel to areas where a vaccine is required.

**Check out insurance options.** Because some health insurance providers may not cover people who travel outside of the United States, it's important to find out if you need to purchase travel health insurance. Don't forget to bring your insurance policies with you. Talk with your travel agent or insurance company well before the trip for information on travel insurance.

**Travel costs.** People with cancer may face additional costs if they make special travel arrangements. Potential costs may include travel expenses for an escort or the costs of bringing medical equipment on the trip.

### Preparing for travel

If your doctor has said it's OK for you to travel, consider these tips:

**Take special care of medications.** All prescription medications should be kept in carry-on baggage, instead of a checked suitcase that may be lost, stolen, or inaccessible (for example, in the plane's cargo area) for an extended time. If possible, bring extra supplies of medications in case your return trip is delayed by a few days. Keep medications in their original containers to avoid drug mix-ups and to show customs officials. If you have syringes and needles for injections, ask your doctor to write a note explaining why it is medically necessary to carry these supplies.

**Carry medical information.** Ask your doctor to write a summary of your medical/drug instructions, any allergies, and diagnosis and treatment plan. Keep this summary, and other emergency information (for example, emergency contact phone numbers), on hand during the trip, and consider translating this information into other languages if you are traveling internationally. Some people carry copies of important medical information and documents on flash drives that can be inserted into a computer if needed, and others store this information online through their doctor's electronic health record (EHR) patient portal. Other people may use a mobile application, such as [Cancer.Net's app](#) [6], to store information about their prescribed medications and any symptoms they experience. Also, ask the doctor to give you a medication schedule if you need to take a medication at a specific time and are traveling across time zones.

**Take health precautions.** To reduce the risk of developing blood clots during long trips, get up and walk around at least once every hour to increase your circulation. Ask the doctor if you should take aspirin or other medications before the trip.

People with lymphedema may need to wear a compression garment while traveling to reduce the chance of swelling of the arms or legs. Try to gently exercise the arms and legs and move around as much as possible during the journey. Avoid tight-fitting clothing on the affected arm or leg, particularly while traveling.

Be aware of germs while traveling. Wash your hands often, use antibacterial hand sanitizers or wipes, and avoid unwashed food or food that has been sitting out, such as food from a buffet. Learn more about [food safety during and after cancer treatment](#) [7].

**Get help from the travel company.** If you are arranging your trip through a travel agency, work with the agency before the trip to arrange special accommodations, such as early boardings, meal restrictions, and help getting from one place to another (for example, a wheelchair). Find out if the travel company has a medical officer who can help with special needs. Or, consider traveling with a companion who can assist with special needs.

**Take it easy.** Remember that traveling can be physically exhausting. Schedule regular rest periods to help reduce fatigue. Try to relax and enjoy your trip.

#### More Information

[When to Call the Doctor During Cancer Treatment](#) [8]

[The Importance of Hydration](#) [9]

[Managing Your Care](#) [10]

#### Additional Resources

[Transportation Security Administration: What to Expect at the TSA Checkpoint if You Are a Breast Cancer Survivor](#) [11]

[TSA: Assistive Devices and Mobility Aids](#) [12]

[CarePages: Cancer and Travel Precautions](#) [13]

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#### Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25256>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25250>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25703>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Treating+Cancer/Managing+Side+Effects/Fatigue>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24659>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25555>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24538>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/26366>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24702>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25015>

[11] [http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/breast\\_prosthetic.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/breast_prosthetic.shtm)

[12] [http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial\\_1370.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1370.shtm)

[13] <http://www.carepages.com/cancer/cancer-and-travel-precautions.html>