

Travel Advice

Having a colostomy should not prevent you from travelling at home or abroad



Freephone helpline:
0800 328 4257

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Having a colostomy should not prevent you from travelling at home or abroad, whether it is for business or pleasure. The only difference is that you should plan ahead and prepare a little more than before.

One of the most important items to have with you, when you are out and about in the UK, is the RADAR key. This key gains you entrance to many public disabled toilets, giving you privacy, running water and disposal bins for your used pouches. The key is obtainable from the Colostomy Association at a cost of £3.50 including postage. Alternatively one can be obtained from RADAR at £3.50 and if required a National Key Guide to toilets for the disabled, which costs an additional £10.25. If you want both you can write to RADAR at Unit 12, City Forum, 250 City Rd, London, EC1V 8AF, or telephone (020 7250 3222). Some Councils or Social Services offer the key free – so do make enquiries.

Travelling Abroad

Ostomates travelling abroad can enjoy their holiday as much as their companions provided, before departure, they make additional preparations for their comfort both whilst travelling and at their destination. Travelling abroad needs special care and attention.

1. Ensure that you receive your prescription from your GP and contact your supplier in good time to receive all your supplies before the travel date. Some products may not be available overseas, so do ensure that you have enough products to last you.
2. Make sure that you have enough supplies to cover every day away PLUS as many again (to handle upset tummies or delays). This means wipes, tissues, disposal bags as well as the actual bags and flanges (wafers).
3. Don't forget to pack at least some of your supplies in your hand baggage! With the reduced size of the cabin baggage, it may not be possible to carry (at least) one month's supply of pouches, flanges etc. Do remember to remove scissors or sharp instruments as these are not allowed in cabin baggage. Place these in your hold luggage.

To save space unpack your pouches from their boxes and repack in clear see-through bags – so that any security check will not necessitate opening and touching your pouches.

4. Always remember to carry your Travel Certificate so that if questioned you can produce it. This explains why you must carry your supplies with you. Ask your GP for a letter explaining your condition and the necessity for the supplies you need to carry in your hand luggage. (Some GP's charge for this letter).
5. Check with your airline on the size of bag allowed as cabin baggage. At the moment the Government's Department of Transport are advising one carry-on bag, maximum size 45x35x16 cm and not exceeding 5-7 kg in weight. It is possible to buy this size bag with wheels attached, making it simple to use at the airport, and the case itself fits easily into the overhead locker. If travelling for a longer period and needing more supplies, contact the Airport Security Manager at your departure airport who may issue you with a dispensation letter allowing an extra bag on medical grounds. Before applying, ask your GP for a letter confirming these needs and carry the letter with you abroad in case you are using internal flights in another country. Do this well ahead of your departure date. You will need to itemize to the Security Manager ALL the supplies to be contained in that bag but remember that no scissors or sharp instruments are allowed.

Alternatively you can pack as much as possible within the limits of your permitted bag, and perhaps persuade your travelling companions to carry some supplies for you as well. Remember that on "airside" you can purchase reading material etc. for your journey and therefore use your carry-on capacity before security check for essentials only.

6. Ensure that you have your small travel-kit easily available, so that on the flight you will have easy access to it – a few clean bags, dry soft tissues, wipes, disposal bags and anti-diarrhoea tablets and re-hydration sachets from your GP or Chemist (**just in case!**). This kit can be in a pocket or in a handy plastic wallet or make-up bag, placed on the top of your carry-on, ready to be removed before you place the larger case in the overhead locker.
7. If you wish to carry any kind of deodorant or adhesive remover spray, then these must be less than 100ml and carried in a clear see-through bag (the airport does provide these immediately before the security checks at the departure area) so that they can be examined by the security officers. Once in the departure area you can place these in your hand luggage.

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8. A very good pouch to wear whilst travelling is the drainable or the flushable – both give you freedom from “disposal” problems. If you were to experience diarrhoea or very loose stools, a drainable bag could be easier to deal with. It also prevents soreness which could be caused by changing a closed bag too frequently. **It is advisable to practise using a drainable or flushable bag before you travel on holiday.**
9. Watch what you eat – especially the day before you travel. Avoid too much spicy food or raw onions. It helps if you eat little and often. Fizzy drinks and alcohol can give rise to problems. Try to avoid skipping meals as this can cause excess wind and fluid.

Remember – even in Britain a change of water can cause a change in bowel habit so it goes without saying that you should be cautious with food and drink abroad.

10. If you are travelling with an airline which has on-line check-in, use it if you can, and if possible choose your seat rather than take pot-luck at the check-in desk.
11. If your stoma is in an “awkward position” get a protector so that your pouch will not be trapped by the safety belt – if you are on a long journey and there is turbulence you might be strapped in for quite a long time!
12. Try to wear loose fitting clothes for a long journey as the reduction of cabin pressure can cause swelling of the feet, ankles and waistline. It rarely causes the bag to balloon! Drink plenty of water and walk around when you are able to.
13. Drink bottled water in foreign countries, making sure that the seal is not broken. Use bottled or boiled water to clean around your stoma.
14. If you are going to somewhere hot, remember to ensure that you are drinking enough water. When you feel thirsty you are already partially dehydrated. Avoid drinking water which is very cold: it is slow to be absorbed, and stays in your stomach giving you the impression that you are no longer thirsty, even though your body still needs it. Under these conditions those who irrigate will find it difficult to remain continent for the normal length of time, and the stoma will tend to produce pellets of faeces. If your stoma thinks it's a rabbit – drink more water!
15. If you have planned properly you shouldn't experience any problems during your journey, and make sure you have an enjoyable time.

Remember the same preparation applies before your return journey!

Travel Certificate

A Travel Certificate should be carried with you when you travel abroad. This can be produced when going through airport security if you have to explain your stoma bags etc. Carry it in your hand, with your passport, as your hand baggage goes through the security screening. These travel certificates are available on request from the

Colostomy Association and are produced with the information in European languages, plus Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin, Thai and Vietnamese. **Please telephone Freephone 0800 328 4257 for you certificate.**



Travel Insurance

The Colostomy Association now offers its own Travel Insurance policy and details can be accessed via the website www.colostomyassociation.org.uk. We are also very happy to give you details of other insurance companies that cover pre-existing medical conditions. Be aware that all insurance companies will ask you about your medical condition, age etc. before quoting a premium.

For more information please telephone Freephone 0800 328 4257.

Make sure you have adequate travel insurance to cover any extra costs incurred in obtaining emergency supplies.

Travel within the EEC

The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is the replacement for the E111. As of 1 January 2006, E111s are not valid. Persons who are normally resident in the United Kingdom (UK) are entitled to a UK issued EHIC.

The EHIC can be used to cover any necessary medical treatment due to either an accident or illness within the European Economic Area (EEA). The card entitles the holder to state-provided medical treatment within the country they are visiting and the service provided will be the same as received by a person covered by the country's 'insured' medical scheme. This may not cover all of the services you would expect within the UK and you may have to make a contribution towards the care you receive.

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The EHIC can also be used to receive treatment for pre-existing illnesses, chronic diseases and routine maternity care, but conditions do apply so please check before you travel. The EHIC does not cover persons who are visiting a country with the main intention of receiving medical treatment.

The EHIC may not cover persons for all medical costs incurred so you are strongly advised also to arrange travel insurance to ensure that you are covered for all possible eventualities. The EHIC is valid within the EEA, which consists of the European Union (EU) plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

An EHIC can be obtained either by applying on line (www.ehic.org.uk), by telephone (0845 606 2030) or by picking up a form and pre-addressed envelope from the Post Office.

Travel Check List

- Make sure hotel accommodation has en-suite facilities.
- Make sure that your Travel Documents are in order.
- Scan (copy) your passport, visas, driving licence (card and paper sections), insurance policy and tickets and store the copies separately from your travel documents. If you have access to e-mail, then store them in your e-mail address. If you lose your travel documents you will have copies instantly available to use in an emergency.
- Take all supplies and travel kit as hand luggage, if possible (excluding scissors and any other sharp instrument) and remember **DON'T LET GO OF IT!**
- Check beforehand whether your airline will allow you to take extra hand baggage for essential medical supplies.
- Note and take with you the make and codes for your supplies and ensure that you have the telephone number for your supply company. In an emergency (lost baggage) they may be able to deliver extra supplies to your holiday destination. Remember that the same products that you use in the UK may not be available abroad, and they will almost certainly have different code numbers.
- Arrive at the airport in plenty of time to help secure an aisle seat. Many airlines now allow on-line check-in 24 hours before departure.
- The day before you travel avoid food and drink that is likely to cause excessive wind.
- Drink bottled water in foreign countries, making sure that the seal is not broken. Avoid ice in drinks unless you are sure that it is safe. Use bottled or boiled water to clean around your stoma area.
- When abroad, store your bags in a cool place, out of direct sunlight.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my bag blow up because of the variations in cabin pressure?

NO. Your bag will act the same as before you entered the plane – however eating and drinking sensibly will lessen the chance of wind in your bag.

Do I have to tell the airline that I have a colostomy?

NO. It serves no useful purpose to disclose that you have a colostomy.

What if I have to change my bag while on the plane?

Change it in the same way you do at home – empty the contents down the toilet, wrap the used bag well in the disposal bag and dispose of the bag in the sanitary disposal unit, or use a drainable or flushable bag.

What if I lose my luggage?

If you are travelling on a tour, inform your tour rep immediately. Hand them your luggage tags and ask them to investigate immediately.

If you are travelling independently, go directly to the airline desk at the airport. Make sure that you receive a “lost baggage” form from the airline with the necessary information to make a claim on your insurance.

Can I buy replacement supplies while abroad?

You may be able to buy them from a pharmacy – remember to keep your receipts, as they will form part of your travel insurance claim when you return home – although the same products that you use in the UK may not be available abroad. They will almost certainly have different code numbers, and you will probably have to pay at least a proportion of the cost, because you will not be registered in that country as having a chronic condition.

If you are unable to find a pharmacy that can offer you supplies, visit the main hospital where you are staying. If they do not have supplies themselves they may know where to obtain them.

How to contact us...

colostomy  association

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