Travel Information

Somerville Heart Foundation

Adult Congenital Heart Disease

ACHD



For young people and adults born with a heart condition

Your destination

To get the most from any holiday or travelling you should plan ahead and consider whether your chosen destination is going to present any challenges to your heart condition.

Things to consider:

Is the destination too hilly for your level of fitness?
Distance above sea level can cause breathlessness and low oxygen levels with certain CHD types - how likely is altitude sickness?
Are you prone to sudden changes in your health?
How near will you be to good medical care?

Extremes of weather also need to be considered. If you are taking lots of medication to regulate your heart, then sitting in very hot sunshine might lead to dehydration and low blood pressure.

The usual precautions regarding eating safe food, drinking safe water and updating vaccinations apply to all travellers. Not all travel vaccines are available on the NHS.

Check www.nhs.uk/conditions/travel-vaccinations for further information



Travelling by Car

A Blue Badge is a parking concession for people with severe walking difficulties and can be obtained from your local authority. It is advisable to seek local advice on the Blue Badge Scheme in your chosen destination.

Travelling with Medicines

It is a good idea to travel with a copy of your prescription and a letter from your GP/Hospital with the details of your medicine, including the name of the health condition that you need the medicine for.

Check your medication supplies and expiry dates in advance of travel to ensure you have enough for your holiday, including extra for any potential delays in travel. Some medicines available over the counter in the UK may only be available on prescription in other countries and vice versa.

Some prescribed medicines contain drugs that are controlled under the Misuse of Drugs legislation in the UK. This means that extra legal controls apply to these medicines. You may need a personal licence to take controlled medicines abroad.

Check the rules for all the countries you are going to, including ones that you are just passing through. Some countries have very strict rules about the types of drugs you can travel with and the maximum quantity you can take in.



See the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk for further info

Oxygen Supplies

If you are travelling outside the UK (including cruises) the NHS will not provide oxygen.

The NHS uses external companies to supply oxygen, and this can be delivered anywhere in the UK. Give your supplier as much notice as possible to arrange delivery. Visit the 'Travelling with CHD' page on our website for a list of oxygen suppliers (www.sfhearts.org.uk/support-services).

If you are travelling by train, ship, coach or aircraft you must ask permission to take oxygen. There may be restrictions on the size of cylinder allowed.

Personal Health Passport (PHP)

If you need medical advice whilst away, carrying a PHP enables a medical professional to know what your diagnosis is and provides them with contact details for your ACHD team.

Personal Health Passports are produced by Somerville Heart Foundation and can be obtained from your ACHD Hospital or the Somerville Heart Foundation office by calling us on 01473 252007.

TOP TIP - take a photo of your last clinic letter which lists your diagnosis and treatment and a copy of your ECG (if possible) when travelling.

Air Travel

Pacemaker or Implantable Defibrillators

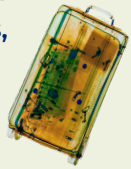
To help make the process easier, show your Medical Device ID Card at the first security station. This card identifies you as having a pacemaker. Depending on the airport, the staff may:

- Send you through the security full body scanner - The Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) full body scanner will not harm your pacemaker or change the settings. However, the metal parts of your pacemaker may set off metal detector alarms.

- Use a hand-held security wand - If held over your pacemaker for too long, the wand could temporarily affect your pacemaker. If they must use a wand, tell them that the search must be done quickly.



- Do a hand-pat search - If you request this, you can ask them to do it privately.



Mobility limitations

Airports are big places, and it is usual to have to walk long distances to get to and from the aeroplane. Make sure you get there with plenty of time, so you don't have to rush. If walking is a particular difficulty, you should inform your travel agent and airline in advance.

At the airport there are usually wheelchairs and/or electric vehicles available. You can also buy a 'Sunflower Lanyard' (available online), this alerts staff that you have a hidden disability and may need extra assistance.



If you want to take your own electric scooter or wheelchair, you will need to provide your airline with details of your equipment (such as make, model, size or weight) well in advance of your flight, to enable the airline to check they can safely load and stow your equipment and undertake a fire risk of electrical equipment.



Reducing your risk of blood clots

Some people with heart problems will be at risk of blood clots forming in their veins during a flight or long journey, this can cause deep vein thrombosis (DVT). This is especially true for long flights. Compression stockings, a high intake of fluid (non-alcoholic) and regular exercise during the flight all help. Ask your doctor if you need additional medication or injections.

Oxygen



During a flight the oxygen level in the cabin is lower than normal. Developing symptoms due to high altitude (altitude sickness) is not usual during flights for most people. If your oxygen level is already low, this can lead to a feeling of increased breathlessness. If you have low oxygen levels, then your doctor may arrange a “Fitness to Fly” test before you travel.

If you need to have oxygen during a flight, this needs to be pre-arranged, and you need to tell your travel agent and airline when booking. Some allow you to travel with your own oxygen concentrators, while others may not. There may be an extra charge for carrying or supplying oxygen, so always shop around for the best prices.

Taking Medicines on Aeroplanes

Always carry medicines in their original containers. Try to carry medicine in your hand luggage in case of lost baggage. It is also worth taking two sets and keeping them separate.

If you need to carry syringes (needles), make sure you have them listed on a prescription or letter from your doctor. Contact the airline to check they allow them on board in hand luggage or if they need to be put in the hold.

In times of high security, airports may only allow you to carry liquid or cream medicines which are essential for the duration of your journey.



Plan ahead.



If you are taking a Warfarin self-monitoring machine (eg. a Coaguchek machine) with you, it is important you keep the test strips with you in your hand luggage. The temperature in the hold of an aircraft is too low for them. If your medicine needs to be refrigerated, make sure there is a fridge at your destination and use a cool bag for travelling.

Travel Insurance

It is important to note that the Government advises that anyone travelling overseas should also take out comprehensive travel insurance.

Insurance companies will ask you some personal questions about things like your age and health, including any 'pre-existing' medical conditions. This means you will have to declare:

- any health condition that you currently live with
- any health condition you have had in the past few years

- any past health ‘events’, like a heart attack or stroke
- any medicines that you currently take
- if you have had a device fitted, such as a pacemaker or implantable cardioverter defibrillator (ICD)
- or other treatments, like heart surgery or a stent

Allow plenty of time to sort out travel insurance, as it may take longer than usual if your insurer asks for more details about your heart condition.

Members of Somerville Heart Foundation can obtain travel insurance information via our website www.sfhearts.org.uk.





Global Health Insurance Card

For most people, the UK Global Health Insurance Card (UK GHIC) replaces the existing EHIC for new applications. It allows you to obtain state healthcare in any EU country and Switzerland at a reduced cost or sometimes for free.

You can access more information and apply for a free GHIC via the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/

Further Information, Support & Membership

Travelling with even complicated heart conditions is possible. Planning well in advance is the key to a successful trip. Talk to your ACHD team so they can support you and your travel plans.

You never know when you may need some extra help or advice. It's free to join Somerville Heart Foundation at www.sfhearts.org.uk/sign-up/ to access our leaflets, newsletters, mental health & wellbeing services and much more...

We are a registered charity, reliant on donations, fundraising and legacies. It's free to join but not free to run - your donations ensure the future of ACHD support for years to come.

Somerville Heart Foundation

Contact us...

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This leaflet was reviewed by
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Many thanks to all involved

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