

Disability Campaign.org

Air Travel Tips for People with Intellectual Disabilities



Planning a vacation is a thrilling adventure. The thought of seeing new destinations, or visiting family and friends is exciting. However, in the anticipation, we can forget necessary details that can lead to a stressful event. Therefore, the Transportation Department recommends pre-planning your trip to avoid any potential outcomes that may lead to a negative experience.

Below is a list of tips that can aid in traveling with self-confidence, surety, and safety.

Pre-Planning:

1. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) now offers travelers a Pre-Check-in option that eliminates long lines, pat downs, and waiting. Pre-checks are available in more than 200 airports and remains in effect for up to five years. An eligible traveler must complete an [online application](#) and schedule an in-person appointment for fingerprinting and a background check prior to approval.

2. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [Trusted Traveler](#) website provides links to four different programs for Pre-Check eligibility ranging from \$50 to \$122.
3. Consider joining an airline rehearsal program (e.g., Wings for Autism, Blue Horizons, and Autism Speaks) that helps travelers undergo a run through of the airport's routine before your day of travel.
4. Ask your physician for a letter that states your disability or illness. Your doctor should also note any medications, specialized equipment or instructions for traveling. Carry this letter with you throughout your journey.
5. Consider purchasing a medical ID bracelet.
6. Book your travel directly with the airline and hotel chain. Company employees can provide valuable information on how to navigate the airport, and they can assist you with special needs. According to the U.S. Transportation Office, airlines can ask about your disability to better understand your requirements.
7. Alert the airline if you're on a special diet.
8. Consider traveling with a trusted friend or family member. When flights are delayed, or during the rushed holiday season, the excited atmosphere may hinder the ability to process what is going on. Someone who knows you can have a calming effect.
9. Travel agents recommend purchasing Travel Insurance to protect against the unexpected.



Before your arrival at the airport:

1. Before arriving verify that your carry-on has your medications, identification, your physician's letter, and any other travel documents (e.g., emergency contact numbers, travel insurance, visas, passports, etc.)
2. Tie a bright color ribbon, cord, or sticker to your luggage, medical equipment, and carry-on. It will help you keep track of your luggage and help identify your items quickly in baggage claim.

3. Check that all necessary equipment has the proper cords, tubes, batteries/chargers, and accessories needed to function correctly during and soon after the flight.
4. Pack a favorite snack to munch on while you wait.
5. Wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Include an extra set of clothes in your carry-on in case of spills or lost luggage.
6. Collect your favorite books, music, games, etc. with a pair of noise-canceling headphones in your bag to help settle you when there are a lot of distractions.
7. Give yourself more time than the suggested timeframe requested by airlines. Most carriers suggest you arrive at the airport one hour before departure for domestic flights, and two hours before an international trip.
8. Consider downloading a map of the airport to your cell phone, or print out a PDF of the terminal, and highlight (or star) the gate for departure/arrival.

Arriving at the airport:

1. When checking in at the counter, identify yourself and confirm with the agent that they have received a notice of your individual needs. Don't assume the airline knows if you require help boarding, deplaning or connecting to another flight. Tell them your needs.
2. Ask a representative for help with a kiosk or lifting your luggage.



Additional Resources:

1. Disability Travel Resources: <http://savvytraveler.publicradio.org/before/disability-resource.shtml>
2. New Directions Travel: <http://www.newdirectionstravel.org>
3. Three Tips for Traveling with Special Needs Children and Adults. *U.S News*. (2015). <https://travel.usnews.com/features/3-tips-for-traveling-with-special-needs-children-and-adults>
4. United Airlines - Customers with Disabilities. *United*. (2018). <https://www.united.com/web/en-US/content/travel/specialneeds/disabilities/default.aspx>
5. TSA Travel pre-check application: <http://www.newdirectionstravel.org>
6. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Trusted Traveler Programs Chart: <https://www.dhs.gov>
7. Wings for Autism – provides airport rehearsal to first time travelers. <http://arcofkingcounty.org/services>
8. Disability Travel Checklist: <http://disabilitycampaign.org>
9. Air Carrier Access Act: <https://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/passengers-disabilities>



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