

Holidays and stroke

Stroke Support Helpline: **0303 3033 100**
or email: **helpline@stroke.org.uk**



Read this online

Holidays are an important part of life. This guide can help you with holiday planning if you have a health condition or disability after a stroke.



Types of holiday

If you're thinking about getting away, there are various holiday options to choose from, with different levels of support.

If you have mobility problems after your stroke, you may prefer to book with a specialist travel agency that can arrange care and equipment for you. Some holiday packages also include an organised programme of activities, such as sports and outdoor activities or visits to local attractions. Others only offer accommodation so you can do your own thing. Specialist travel agencies can help you find places to stay with accessible facilities, such as adapted bathrooms, ramps and ground-floor bedrooms.

It's also worth considering which mode of travel best suits your needs. Specialist travel companies often offer a range of options such as accessible cruises and coach trips. Always make your travel provider aware of any individual requirements when you book.

In the UK, transport providers must take steps to make services accessible to travellers with disabilities. See **gov.uk/transport-disabled** for more information.



Air travel after a stroke

People often ask whether it's safe to fly after a stroke. There is no set answer to this. Most airlines will not carry someone within the first few days of a stroke, but the rules vary between airlines and countries.

You are at the highest risk of another stroke in the weeks immediately after your previous stroke. In the UK, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) advises waiting at least two weeks before flying if you have had a stroke, or at least two days after a transient ischaemic attack (TIA). The CAA advises you should seek individual advice on your condition from your treating specialist before travelling and discuss any travel plans with them.

Each airline will have its own rules on flying with medical conditions, so you need to check with your airline well in advance of travelling.

It's especially important to check your airline's requirements if your stroke was recent, you have an unstable health condition, you have mobility requirements, or you need to bring medical equipment or a carer on board. If your airline has concerns about how flying might impact your condition, it may also ask you and your doctor to complete a medical information form (Medif). A doctor might charge a fee for this and you may need to complete another form for future trips. Your airline will make the final decision about whether you can fly or not. The CAA has more information for passengers on its website at [caa.co.uk/passengers-and-public/before-you-fly/am-i-fit-to-fly](https://www.caa.co.uk/passengers-and-public/before-you-fly/am-i-fit-to-fly)

If you've recently had a stroke, it's really important to get medical advice about your own situation before you travel. Immediately after a stroke, you may need to attend check-ups and have medical treatment. The full effects of a stroke may take time to emerge. You might need treatment for these effects and you might need to attend therapy sessions. You might need blood-thinning medication to reduce the risk of blood clots. This needs to be taken regularly to be effective. So you need to plan carefully before travelling to make sure you have the right medications with you and that you take them at the right times.

If you have a stroke abroad, you might need a flight to get back home. It's important to get medical insurance before you travel. Your insurance company should give you help and advice on medical treatment and returning home. See page 3. You can also contact the local British Consulate for advice and practical support.

Travel and blood circulation

During a flight, the air pressure inside an aeroplane cabin is lower than it is on the ground. So when you fly, you have a bit less oxygen in your blood than normal. This may affect certain people with a heart problem or breathing condition, so ask your GP or specialist if this applies to you.

On a long journey, you're likely to be inactive for a period of time, which makes you more likely to develop a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). A DVT is a blood clot in a vein, often in the leg.

The best way to reduce the risk of a DVT on any long journey is to drink plenty of water and keep moving. Simple exercises like flexing your ankles or walking around will improve your blood flow. Do this regularly during the journey.

If you have had a DVT in the past, and you do not take anti-coagulation medication, ask your GP for advice before a long journey.

Some travellers wear compression stockings during a flight. Ask your GP or pharmacist for individual advice before using these. You should not wear compression stockings if you have peripheral artery disease (PAD). This condition reduces blood flow in your legs, so wearing the stockings can reduce blood flow too much.

Getting around the airport

All European airports must provide services to help you move through the airport and get on and off the plane if you have reduced mobility or a disability. This is often known as 'special assistance.' Contact your airline or travel provider in advance to discuss any additional help you will need at the airport or on the flight. You should try to do this as soon as possible, and at least 48 hours before travelling.

Most airlines will carry two items of mobility equipment for free. This is in addition to your baggage allowance. If you have a wheelchair, it will be stored in the hold. You should tell your airline before you travel if you're taking a battery-powered wheelchair or mobility aid.

Special assistance desks can often provide 'hidden disabilities' lanyards if you'd like one. This lets airport staff know you have a less visible condition but might need some support and consideration, for example, if you have sensory problems and find busy airports overwhelming. You could also consider buying a fast-track security pass or a lounge pass to get away from the crowds.

Airline crew on board the plane are not able to provide personal care or administer medication. The airline may insist you travel with a companion or carer if you are unable to eat, understand safety briefings or reach emergency exits without help.

Tip: If you have communication difficulties such as aphasia, carrying a communication card can help make others aware of your needs and how they can support you. Order one free from shop.stroke.org.uk or by calling the Stroke Support Helpline.



Do I need travel insurance?

It's important to have travel insurance and it's a good idea to get it as soon as you book a trip. It's especially important if you're going abroad, to ensure you have cover for medical emergencies and care.

Make sure you tell the insurance company you've had a stroke when arranging your insurance and check you're fully covered. Many policies will exclude conditions you had before you took out the policy (known as pre-existing medical conditions).

This varies between policies, but it could mean you would have to pay for any costs relating to these conditions. There are specialist travel insurers which provide cover for pre-existing conditions.

The Stroke Association has a partnership with specialist medical travel insurer AllClear Travel, who provide comprehensive cover to stroke survivors. Visit stroke.org.uk/insurance

Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC)

The Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) allows you to receive essential, state-provided healthcare in certain countries, either for free or at the same cost a local person would pay. It will cover necessary treatment until you return to the UK and treatment of pre-existing medical conditions.

It will not cover certain costs, including the cost of returning to the UK, so you still need private travel insurance too.

You can apply for a free GHIC online at nhs.uk/ghic (or call **0300 330 1350** if you cannot do it online). Avoid unofficial websites which may charge fees. You should allow up to 15 working days for your card to arrive in the post.

GHICs are replacing European Health Insurance Cards (EHIC), which will no longer be valid after the expiry date passes on existing cards.

European emergency number: 112

Dial 112 from anywhere in the UK or Europe to be connected to local emergency services.

Travelling with medication

If you're carrying medication or medical equipment like syringes in your hand luggage, you should bring documentation such as a doctor's letter. You should also carry a copy of your prescription. As well as helping you avoid problems at airport security and customs, this will be useful if you need medical help while you're away. Make sure you bring enough medication with you to cover unexpected delays.

Carry medication in both your hand luggage and another bag, in case any of your luggage gets lost. If you are travelling across time zones, ask your pharmacist for advice about timing your medication.

Oxygen

It may be possible to take oxygen cylinders on board a plane. You need to contact the airline about this before you book. Asthma + Lung UK has more information on travelling with a lung condition at asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/travel

Liquid medication and air travel

Current airport rules on liquids in hand luggage state you can only take containers of up to 100ml, placed in one small, clear, resealable plastic bag. However, you can carry essential liquid medication of more than 100ml in hand luggage if you have a doctor's letter or prescription. Airport security staff may open containers to screen liquids. For more information, contact your airline.

Check before you fly

Always contact your airline or travel company for the latest guidance before you travel if you have any questions about health conditions or support for disabled travellers.

There may be restrictions on taking medications into some countries, or specific health advice on travel in a particular area. Visit gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or check beforehand with the embassy of the country you're travelling to.

Where to get help and information

From the Stroke Association

Stroke Support Helpline

Our Stroke Support Helpline offers information and support for anyone affected by stroke, including family, friends and carers.

Call us on **0303 3033 100**, from a textphone **18001 0303 3033 100** or email helpline@stroke.org.uk

Read our information

Log onto stroke.org.uk where you can find easy-to-understand information, videos and an online community to support you. You can also call the Stroke Support Helpline to ask for printed copies of our guides.

Other sources of help and information

Advice about travelling with disabilities

AccessAble

Website: accessable.co.uk

Tel: **01438 842 710**

Information about access to thousands of venues across the UK and Republic of Ireland, including shops, theatres, hotels and railway stations.

Disabled Travel Advice

Website: disabledtraveladvice.co.uk

Information on all aspects of travelling with a disability.

Fit For Travel

Website: fitfortravel.nhs.uk

Travel health information from Public Health Scotland.

Gov.uk

Website: gov.uk/transport-disabled

UK Government website with information for disabled people about travel by planes, trains, buses, coaches and taxis.

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

Website: rnib.org.uk

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Information to help people with vision problems plan a holiday.

Shared Care Scotland

Website: sharedcarescotland.org.uk

Tel: **01383 622 462**

Information to help you and your carer plan a short break and respite care, plus where to apply for funding if you need to.

Tourism for All

Website: tourismforall.org.uk

National charity with information for people with disabilities, including on planning a trip in the UK or abroad.

Visit Britain

Website: visitbritain.com

British tourist authority website, with guides to accessible travel, accommodation and attractions.

Organisations that arrange holidays or respite breaks

Disaway Trust

Website: disaway.co.uk

Tel: **01737 214 805**

Organises group holidays in the UK and abroad for people with physical disabilities. Volunteer helpers and a nurse are available. Holidaymakers are expected to pay for the holiday.

Holidays with Help

Website: holidayswithhelp.org.uk

Provides respite care breaks for people with disabilities and their carers. Trained helpers provide support.

The Jumbulance Trust

Website: jumbulance.org.uk

Tel: **07483 414330**

Travel charity offering short breaks or days out in accessible coaches, for people with disabilities or serious health conditions.

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Activity breaks

The 3H Foundation

Website: the3hfoundation.org.uk

Tel: **01892 860 207**

Provides subsidised group holidays for children and adults with disabilities.

Volunteers provide help and support. In some cases, grants are available towards UK breaks for people on low incomes.

Calvert Trust Centres

Website: calvertexmoor.org.uk

calvertlakes.org.uk

calvertkielder.org.uk

Enables people with disabilities, their families and friends to take part in outdoor activity holidays at three centres in England.

Disability Snowsport UK

Website: disabilitysnowsport.org.uk

Tel: **01479 788 770**

Email: admin@disabilitysnowsport.org.uk

Provides overseas activity breaks and adaptive ski schools throughout the UK.

PHAB

Website: phab.org.uk

Tel: **020 8667 9443**

Email: info@phab.org.uk

Operates activity holidays and clubs throughout England and Wales.

Accommodation

Leonard Cheshire Disability

Website: leonardcheshire.org

Offers short breaks for people with disabilities and their carers. They also have activity and skills groups at day centres around the UK.

Travel agents

ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents)

Website: abta.com/tips-and-advice/accessible-travel

Trade association for British travel agents, whose members must follow its code of conduct. Website has information about planning accessible travel on planes, ferries and cruises.

Enable Holidays

Website: enableholidays.com

Tel: **0330 380 6800**

A specialist tour operator for people with disabilities. Offers holidays in several overseas locations and audits hotels for accessibility.

Traveleyes

Website: traveleyes-international.com

Tel: **0113 834 6094**

Organises group holidays for people with vision problems and sighted people.

Help with funding holidays

Family Holiday Charity

Website: familyholidaycharity.org.uk

Tel: **020 3117 0650**

Funds holidays in the UK for low-income families with children.

Disability Aid Trust

Website: disabilityaidtrust.org.uk

Tel: **0800 028 0647**

Email: secretary@disabilityaidtrust.org.uk

A charity that contributes towards the cost of hiring helpers so disabled people can have a holiday.

Hiring mobility equipment for holidays

Mobility Equipment Hire Direct

Website: mobilityequipmenthiredirect.com

Tel: **0800 644 6062**

Hires out a range of mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and scooters. As well as UK hire, they have overseas branches so you can hire items at some destinations.

Mobility Hire

Website: mobilityhire.com

Tel: **0800 111 6234**

Hires out a range of mobility equipment such as wheelchairs and scooters. You can use items for travelling abroad.

About our information

We want to provide the best information for people affected by stroke. That's why we ask stroke survivors and their families, as well as medical experts, to help us put our publications together.

How did we do?

To tell us what you think of this guide, or to request a list of the sources we used to create it, email us at **feedback@stroke.org.uk**

Accessible formats

Visit our website if you need this information in audio, large print or braille.

Always get individual advice

This guide contains general information about stroke. But if you have a problem, you should get individual advice from a professional such as a GP or pharmacist. Our Stroke Support Helpline can also help you find support. We work very hard to give you the latest facts, but some things change. We don't control the information provided by other organisations or websites.

You know more than most just how shocking and confusing having a stroke is. We're here to support you and your family find the strength and determination to get back to life.

Learn more about stroke support: **stroke.org.uk**

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