


# How to Request Airport Wheelchair Assistance

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There are times when you might need extra help to get to and from your flights. Perhaps you are recovering from surgery or have a health condition that makes walking difficult. You may have tripped a day or two before your flight, making the trek through the airport extremely painful.

This is where airport wheelchair assistance comes in. Thanks to the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986, all US-based airlines must offer passengers with disabilities wheelchair transportation to and from their gates. Foreign airlines must offer the same service for passengers on flights departing from or flying to the United States. If you have to change planes, your airline must provide wheelchair assistance for your connection. Regulations vary in other countries, but most major airlines offer some type of wheelchair assistance.

Here are the best ways to request and use wheelchair assistance at the airport.

## Before Your Departure Date

Allow extra time between flights. You may encounter delays if you are traveling during the summer or the holidays, when wheelchair attendants are busy helping other passengers.

Choose the largest airplane available when making reservations. You will have more seating and restroom options available to you on an airplane that seats more than 60 passengers and / or has two or more aisles.

Call your airline and request wheelchair assistance at least 48 hours before your trip begins. **If possible, call earlier.** The customer service representative will put a "requires special assistance" note in your reservation record and tell your departure, arrival and transfer airports to provide a wheelchair.

think about meals before you travel. You may not be able to buy food before or between flights. Your wheelchair attendant is not required to take you to a restaurant or fast food stand. If possible, pack your own food at home and carry it with you onto your flight.

## At Your Departure Airport

Arrive early, especially if you are traveling during a holiday period. Give yourself enough time to check in for your flight, check your bags and go through security. Do not assume you will get head-of-line privileges at the checkpoint. You may also have to wait for a wheelchair attendant to arrive and help you. Plan ahead and allow extra time.

Tell your wheelchair attendant what you can and cannot do before you get to the security screening area. If you can stand and walk, you will need to walk through or stand inside the security screening device and put your carry-on items on the screening belt. If you cannot walk through the screening device or stand with your arms over your head, you will need to undergo a pat-down screening. You can request a private pat-down. Your wheelchair will be examined, too.

Expect to check your personal wheelchair, if you use one, at the boarding gate. Airlines do not permit passengers to use their own wheelchairs during flight. If your wheelchair requires disassembly, bring instructions.

If you need wheelchair assistance on the airplane, you will probably board before most other passengers. Stating your needs and abilities will help your wheelchair attendant and the flight attendants provide you with the best possible help.

**Important:** Tip your wheelchair attendant(s). Many wheelchair attendants in the US are paid below minimum wage.

## Between Flights

Wait to leave your aircraft until other passengers have deplaned. A wheelchair attendant will be waiting for you and will take you to your next flight.

If you need to use the restroom on the way to your connecting flight, state that you are a traveler with a disability and you need to stop at a restroom. The wheelchair attendant will take you to a restroom that is on the way to your departure gate. In the US, by law, your attendant does not have to take you to a place where you can buy food.

## At Your Destination Airport

Your wheelchair attendant will be waiting for you when you deplane. He or she will take you to the baggage claim area. If you need to stop at a restroom, you will need to tell the attendant, as described above.

## Escort Passes

can go with you to your departure gate or meet you at your arrival gate. Not all airlines issue escort passes at every airport. Plan on using wheelchair assistance on your own in case your companion cannot get an escort pass.

## How to Resolve Wheelchair Assistance Problems


Many passengers use wheelchair assistance. Airlines have also noticed that some passengers who do not need wheelchair assistance use it to bypass security screening lines. Because of these factors, you may have to wait a while for your wheelchair attendant to arrive. This issue is best resolved by giving yourself enough time to check in and go through security.

On rare occasions, airline passengers have been taken to baggage claim or other areas of the airport and left there by wheelchair attendants. Your best defense in this situation is a cell phone that is programmed with useful telephone numbers. Call family, friends or a taxi if you find yourself in this situation.

Although airlines prefer to have 48 to 72 hours' notice, you can ask for a wheelchair when you arrive at the airport check-in counter. Give yourself plenty of extra time if you must request wheelchair assistance at the last minute.

If you encounter a problem before or during your flight(s), ask to speak with your airline's Complaints Resolution Official (CRO). Airlines in the US must have a CRO on duty, either in person or via telephone, to resolve disability-related issues.

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 Young couple in wheelchair strolling in  
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Heathrow Terminal 3

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Navigating Terminal 3 at London's Heathrow Airport

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