



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



A guide to travelling with sleep apnoea

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There is no reason why having sleep apnoea should severely limit travelling options. This guide has been designed to make travelling with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) straightforward and provides information which you may find useful relating to:

- Where you travel – UK and overseas
- How you travel i.e. road, rail, air, sea or bus
- Accommodation i.e. hotel, camping/caravan park, boat and with family/friends
- Other considerations

UK travel

Modern CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) or AUTOSET (variable pressure) equipment is usually portable and supplied with its own carrying case; so there should be no issues with travel within the UK via all modes of transport.

These devices are medical pieces of equipment and should be carried as hand luggage and not placed in the hold of the aircraft (as this can damage the machine).

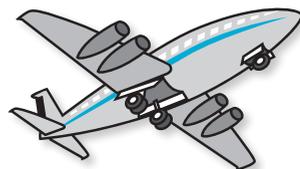
For domestic flights it is likely the machine will count towards your hand luggage weight and item number allowance. We advise you contact the airline you are travelling with, to find out more information about their medical equipment and baggage allowance policy, as they can differ.

To ensure smooth passage through check-in, security and customs, please contact the Lung Function and Sleep (LF&S) team who can provide a personalised letter regarding your machine to take with you. This letter will include your details and the serial number of the machine. Please request this well in advance of your journey. Please also note your machine can pass through the X-ray machine at the airport without affecting the running of your device.

Overseas

Air

The advice for international flights is the same as for domestic flights however there are some additional considerations.



You may want to use CPAP on the aircraft particularly on long-haul flights and this should be possible; however it is advisable to contact the airline in advance to do this. There is no reason why the airline should refuse use, however if you experience problems, it is best to contact the technical department of the airline who may ask for a form to be completed relating to your particular machine. Most manufacturers have an aviation authority prepared statement related to the suitability of the device for use on aircraft. This is usually available via their website. If the airline provides you with a letter from the airline's medical services giving permission to use CPAP during flight, remember to take this with you.

Also remember to arrange seating near a power supply and confirm the type of power cord/adaptor required on the plane.

Please note: Do not use a humidifier during flight as per manufacturer's recommendations.

Cruise ships

There should be a suitable power supply available but contact the tour operator in advance to make sure.

Boats and yachts

Most marinas and vessels have a mains power supply but it is always worth checking before booking anything, so that you can be certain that a power source is available.

Bus/coach

It is unlikely a power supply will be available on a bus or coach for use on long journeys. There may be the possibility of using

a battery pack, therefore please check the coach company first before travelling.

Train

Power supplies may be available on sleeper trains, however always check with the train company concerned prior to travel.

Where you are staying

Indoors

The main consideration for staying away from home is access to power supply. Most indoor residences have easy access to a power supply therefore this should not be a problem, however it is advisable to take an extension lead in case sockets are not available by the bedside. It is advisable to contact your hotel or guest house in advance to inform them of your requirements as they may be able to assign you a more suitable room.

Camping and caravanning

Most caravans have an electricity supply, as do some tent pitches. These may be mains supply or from 12 volt batteries (car battery). The battery in your car can also be used to provide power, taking care not to drain it. A change in power supply (i.e. not from mains), usually requires an adaptor – these can be purchased from the CPAP manufacturer.



Batteries

As mentioned earlier, car batteries (lead acid types) are suitable for running CPAP machines. You can also purchase lightweight lithium batteries, but these tend to be quite expensive. Battery packs can be hired from certain manufacturers (arrange well in advance as they have a limited number) and may prove to be the most cost-effective and practical alternative. N.B. Airlines will not carry lead batteries.

You will also need to make arrangements to charge the batteries. This can often be done at a local garage. Alternatively a mains charger for the particular battery type is an option if available. Solar chargers are also a possibility; however these are very expensive and therefore only cost-effective if used regularly. They also need a charge controller to prevent over charging which can damage the battery.

If your machine cannot be connected directly to a 12 volt power supply, an inverter can be used to make a battery usable. An inverter is a device that changes a low voltage direct current into a mains level alternating current (DC to AC). Check with the manufacturer of your machine to see which inverter is suitable.

Converters are also available for CPAP machines, these convert the voltage where a higher or lower voltage is required. For instance it would allow you to use your CPAP/AUTOSET from a 12 or 24 V power source where a suitable battery is available i.e. a boat or car.

All this information can be confusing; the easiest way to find out what you need is to contact the manufacturer, the details of which can usually be found easily on the internet. If you cannot find the information, please contact LF&S well in advance of your holiday for help.

High altitude

If staying at high altitude, adjustments may be required to your machine to compensate for this. Most machines compensate automatically to an altitude of 2591m, however please get in touch with the LF&S team if this is required.

Other considerations

Health and travel

If you have co-existing conditions such as heart or lung disease, check with your GP about any special precautions advised for the area of travel. If you have any specific concerns about travelling with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea/Hypopnoea Syndrome (OSAHS), please discuss this with your GP.

It is also advisable to contact your travel insurance company to inform them of your condition as this may affect your insurance. They may ask questions about your condition so be prepared by having details to hand when you contact them.

Hygiene

Be extra thorough when travelling abroad particularly to warm climates where bacteria and fungi grow well. Following your usual cleaning regime (soap and water) should be sufficient (this is usually explained at the time of CPAP issue in Lung Function and Sleep) but please take extra care when using a humidifier and remember to dry things thoroughly before use. This particularly relates to tubes and masks, as well as head and chin straps, which when sweat-soaked can cause skin problems.

Milton can be used in countries where hygiene is a particular problem, however follow container instructions very carefully for safe use, and keep use to a minimum as regular use can cause damage to masks and hoses. Be careful when rinsing equipment as water supplies abroad can be far from pure.

Useful spares

- Electrical socket extension lead
- Travel adaptor, suitable to the country/countries of travel
- Spare fuses and screwdriver for the plug
- Insulating tape for repairing hose damage
- Surge protector - these are recommended for home use with CPAP

Overseas travel

Power supplies

Before travelling, it is very important that you to check what type of power available, specifically the voltage. This is variable across the world.

If in doubt, the equipment manufacturer should provide technical information about their equipment. The main consideration is the voltage. In the UK, the mains voltage is 220 to 240 and as such this is the voltage your machine will be designed to run off. Some parts of the world use 110 volt systems. Most CPAP machines have a range of 100 to 240 volts, most adjusting automatically to change; others require a voltage switch to be changed. The majority of the machines supply by Lung Function and Sleep change automatically but if in doubt, double check with the manufacturer.

If you are travelling to less populated or remote areas check that a power supply is existent. Be aware that the power supply may be unreliable with possible interruptions. You should check if the hotel has a generator and if so, whether it runs all night. You may need to take a battery if the power is unreliable (see relevant section earlier in this guide).

Quick reference check list

Make sure you have the following arranged before travelling:

- Power supply
- Spares
- Travel company contact
- Health insurance
- Travel documents i.e. CPAP airline letter
- Contact number of machine manufacturer



Useful contacts

ResMed (UK) Ltd

Telephone: 01235 862 997 from UK
0044 123 586 2997 from outside the UK

Address: 96 Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4RW

Website: www.resmed.com/uk/index.html

Lung Function and Sleep

Address: Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2GW

Telephone: 0121 371 3870. Open Monday-Friday, 09:00-17:00

Website: www.uhb.nhs.uk/respiratory-medicine.htm

Sleep Apnoea Trust

Provides advice for patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnoea/Hypopnoea Syndrome (OSAHS).

Helpline: 0800 025 3500

Website: www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org