



# 7 INFLIGHT TIPS

FOR TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

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While there is a large focus on how wheelchairs are handled in the world of travelling with disabilities, comfort and accessibility aboard a flight are just as important. Here are some tips to help you have a more comfortable flight as well as information about your legal rights onboard as a passenger traveling with a disability.

## 1. Type of Plane

Before you book your flight, try to find out what type of plane will be used. In many cases, larger planes offer more aisle room, more leg room and sometimes, larger bathrooms—all factors that could affect your comfort. The type of aircraft is usually noted when searching online for flights. Websites like [SeatGuru](#) also offer aircraft model and seating maps. Travel agents are also a good resource for this information.

## 2. Call the Airline in Advance

Although it is not legally required in most cases for passengers who need special accommodations to notify an airline ahead of time, it is required in a few cases, including if you want to bring something like an oxygen tank on board with you. But even if it's not required, speaking with the airline ahead of time can bring some peace of mind, including confirming what type of aircraft will be used, your seating assignment and procedures to help you onboard. Airlines have dedicated phone numbers and employees to answer accessibility questions.

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### 3. Pre-boarding

Airlines must allow those using wheelchairs or with other specific physical needs to board the plane before others. Taking advantage of this makes the boarding process smoother, and can set the tone for the whole journey, according to one frequent traveler, Candace Cable, who wrote about her experience for the [Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation](#).

### 4. Assistance

Airlines must provide boarding assistance to those who need it. Trained personnel are required to help those with disabilities board their flights and get on and off the plane, and in and out of their seats, according to the [Air Carrier Access Act](#). Although the experience can differ from one flight to the next; from one airline to another, the blogger and frequent traveler Cory Lee of Curb Free with Cory Lee made a [video](#) of his typical boarding process.

As seen in Lee's [video](#), most planes are accommodated with narrow wheelchairs that fit down the aisles. These are used to help passengers reach their seats, and can also be used to access the lavatory. It is a good idea to confirm with the flight attendants that they know where this chair will be stowed during the flight and if they know how to assemble it, according to traveler Cable, who wrote about her [experience](#). For more photos and descriptions of the various types of aisle wheelchairs, check out the blog [Wheelchair Travel](#).



## 5. Seating

Airlines must accommodate the **seating needs** of a passenger with disabilities, unless it puts other passengers in danger. Explain your needs to the staff so they can best accommodate you, whether that means giving you a bulkhead seat so you can fly with your service animal or a seat with movable armrests so you can get in and out of it more easily. Remember that **bulkhead seats** often do not have moveable armrests.

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## 6. Restrooms

Be aware that onboard restrooms are small, and that airline staff are not allowed to transfer passengers to toilets, although they can help you into and out of the aisle wheelchair so that you can reach the door of the restroom. Some large planes that fly mainly international routes have in recent years made onboard restrooms more accessible, as documented on the blog [Wheelchair Travel](#).

Keep in mind that airlines can require, in certain limited situations, that someone with specific disabilities travels with a companion on the flight.



## 7. Filing a Complaint

Remember that if something does go wrong and you feel that your rights were violated, you should file a formal complaint as soon as possible with the airline's Complaint Resolution Official, who must be on duty in every airport the airline serves during business hours. You should also file a complaint with the **Department of Transportation**. But remember that airlines do not have to respond to complaints filed more than 45 days after an incident occurs.

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