

# Taking Off

## Tips for traveling by air with portable oxygen concentrators

The skies became a little friendlier this year for passengers who use portable oxygen concentrators (POCs).

A new rule took effect in May 2009 that states air carriers must allow passengers to use a POC approved by the Department of Transportation's Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), if medically necessary, on all commercial passenger flights departing or arriving in the U.S.

With some advanced planning, passengers with chronic lung diseases can travel safely by air. Speak with your physician about your trip. Even if you don't regularly use supplemental oxygen, you may still require in-flight oxygen due to higher altitude during flight.

Once you have been evaluated by your physician and have her approval to travel by air, she must sign a medical statement that must be carried with you at all times during your trip. Most importantly, it should describe your medical necessity for oxygen during all or only portions of the flight, your flow settings, your ability to understand and respond to device alarms, and the POC's model name or number.

Some airlines require passengers to use a specific form, so be sure to call an airline representative when booking your travel to notify him that you will be flying with an FAA-approved POC. Most airlines require at least 48 hours notice.

The majority of air carriers don't allow you to plug into aircraft power; therefore, it's important for you to be conscientious about supplemental battery use, especially in case of unexpected delays. Airline carriers can require patients to carry enough fully charged batteries to operate the POC onboard the aircraft for at least 150 percent of the expected maximum flight duration. Don't pack your extra batteries in your checked luggage. Put them in your carry-on bag and bring power adapters to recharge them.

It's your responsibility to ensure your POC is in accordance with the airline's requirements. The FAA has approved several POCs for in-flight use for passengers requiring oxygen. They're listed at [www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/cabin\\_safety/portable\\_oxygen](http://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/cabin_safety/portable_oxygen).

When choosing a POC device for air travel, consider its weight,



power supply, ease of battery replacement, and optional accessories such as a wheeled cart that can help you navigate a busy airport terminal. Most POCs weigh 5 to 10 pounds and deliver oxygen only by the demand mode. However, more systems are becoming available that weigh about 15 pounds without batteries and give up to 1 to 3 liters of continuous flow.

Allow extra time for your POC to be inspected at security checkpoints. Upon boarding, the flight crew may want to inspect your POC and confirm that it's FAA-approved. The crew will ensure that you're positioned in a seat that won't hinder other passengers' safety and that any tubing doesn't pose a tripping hazard.

While you're on the plane, follow the directions for usage of your POC as written on your physician statement. Your POC must be turned off and stowed properly during unauthorized times. If you want to get up and walk around the cabin with your POC, be sure this is listed on your physician statement. Your oxygen requirement is likely to be greater if you frequently move around the cabin. You may want to consider using a pulse oximeter made specifically for high altitudes to monitor your oxygen saturation during the flight.

You're also responsible for contacting a local oxygen provider to arrange for oxygen equipment that you may need at your final destination. Be sure to have a phone number for the local oxygen provider and name of your contact person, in case a representative isn't at the arrival gate when you disembark.

Passengers who use POCs can aim high with their travel plans if they follow these down-to-earth tips. ■

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