What do you need to know about driving safely?

Many people with COPD continue to drive safely. The following are some considerations to ensure your safety and that of others.

- COPD may affect your ability to drive safely, and could result in a crash.
- Drivers who develop a permanent or long term medical condition that may negatively affect their ability to drive safely must report their condition to the Department of Transport as soon as it develops.
- Talk to your doctor about your medical condition and any potential impact this may have on your ability to drive safely. They may provide a medical certificate stating your fitness to drive, or any conditions under which you can drive.
- Low oxygen levels or increased carbon dioxide levels may lead to poor judgement, drowsiness and reduced concentration.
- Driving ability may be affected by severe coughing fits which may lead to loss of consciousness.
- Oxygen therapy can enhance cognitive performance, longevity and wellbeing in those with chronic lung disease. If you have been prescribed long term oxygen you should clarify with your doctor about using oxygen while driving.
- Make sure the oxygen is secured in the car so that it doesn’t pose an additional safety risk in case of a crash.
- Daytime sleepiness, sleep apnoea and other sleep disorders have the potential to impair driving performance and safety and pose a risk of crashing. Consult your doctor and seek advice about precautions when driving.

How can you plan your travel to prevent health problems?

Travel related health problems arise from a variety of factors related to your travel environment eg. holiday destination, types of activities, food and water quality.

Travel related health problems can also arise when a pre-existing medical condition worsens during travel.

Fortunately most travel related problems can be prevented with careful advance planning. Consult your doctor or travel medicine clinic so that a travel plan can be discussed in detail.

Consider the destination and how the following might affect your underlying health condition.
Better Living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease A Patient Guide

Chapter 20: Travel and COPD

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Other suggestions:
- Take medical documents with you/have your GP liaise ahead with major health centres. Map out phone numbers of medical services.
- Have travel insurance or access to health care.
- Insurance can be difficult for people with chronic disease. Some countries have reciprocal health care with Australia - refer to the following websites:
- Take plentiful supply of medicine and health equipment eg. relievers, puffers, oxygen tubing, masks, electrical adaptors, batteries.
- When driving in Australia, the National Public Toilet Map, provides information on where the nearest facility is (www.toiletmap.gov.au).

General Problems Caused by Commercial Travel
- Dryness of air.
- Reduced mobility and potential DVT (blood clots) - those with chronic disease such as COPD would be advised to wear compression sockwear for long flights.
- Proximity to others and risk of infections.
- Long periods of travel disturb 24hr clock - sleeping, eating, taking medications.
- Stress of navigating busy airports, unknown roads.

Although air travel is safe for the majority of people, people with COPD may be at risk due to the decrease in the concentration of oxygen in humidified air.

Preparing for airline travel
- Visit your doctor several weeks or months before travel, to check if you will need oxygen during flight. If you do, check with your airline before you book your flight, as not all airlines provide easy access to oxygen facilities.
- Learn what your oxygen needs will be while flying, and while in terminals. Airlines do not provide oxygen on the ground. Speak with your doctor and other health care team members about arrangements to supply oxygen for each flight.

Accommodation considerations
- Try to avoid places that cannot provide smoke free restaurants and accommodation.
- If you need portable oxygen, check that your accommodation provider will allow oxygen cylinders to be delivered and stored on their premises.
- Check access to the room. Do you need to climb flights of stairs to get there, or is there a lift?

What do you need to know about air travel?
Although air travel is safe for the majority of people, people with COPD may be at risk due to the decrease in the concentration of oxygen in humidified air.

Some people with COPD may require supplementary oxygen when travelling by air, even though they do not usually need it at home. Your doctor can arrange for a test (High Altitude Simulation Testing) to assess your oxygen requirements when travelling by air.
part of the trip. Remember to bring enough batteries and power adaptors, masks, and tubes for use during your trip.

- Most airlines require a Travel Clearance Form (MEDIF form) or a letter from a doctor outlining your condition, approval for air travel, need for oxygen in-flight, specific information of oxygen flow rate. Bring enough copies for all flights.
- Make sure you have adequate supply of your usual medications for the trip.
- Carry multiple copies of your prescriptions in case luggage is delayed, lost or stolen.
- If prescribed, carry relievers and puffers in your hand luggage.
- Oxygen policies and charges can vary depending on the airline. Make sure you check with the airlines about their requirements and available help for travellers with medical conditions.
- Travellers requiring CPAP may need a letter from their doctor for equipment to travel in cabin as extra hand luggage.
- Discuss risks and management of potential deep vein thrombosis. This may occur as a result of reduced activity during prolonged travel.

Oxygen policies and charges can vary depending on the airline. Make sure you check their requirements and available help for travellers with medical conditions.

What do you need to know about travelling with oxygen?

There are two important considerations:

- How do you safely transport your oxygen supply, whether you have a concentrator or portable cylinders?
- Can you use portable oxygen whilst in transit?

Transporting home concentrators

A home oxygen concentrator is transportable (although heavy) and can normally be taken away with you. It is important to talk to your supplier about how to transport it safely, but here are some general guidelines:

- Concentrators must be carried upright. They may be damaged if transported lying flat or on their side.
- If travelling by car, put the concentrator in the boot if possible, or on the back seat restrained by a seatbelt.
- Check with the airline or travel provider to make sure they will allow your concentrator on board as hand luggage and ask about the extra cost. It may be cheaper and easier to hire one and have it delivered to where you are staying.

Transporting portable cylinders

- Ask your supplier for instructions on how to safely transport your oxygen cylinders.
- Check with the airline or travel provider to ensure they will allow your cylinders on board as hand luggage. Alternatively arrange to hire cylinders at your destination.
- Portable cylinders should not be taken overseas, as other countries may not be able to fill them.
Using oxygen during your journey

**Portable oxygen cylinders**

- Many airlines do not allow you to take your own portable oxygen cylinders on board. Instead you may need to hire an aircraft approved oxygen cylinder or arrange in-flight oxygen through the airline.

- If you are using the airline’s own in-flight oxygen equipment, they may not allow you to take it off the plane. So, if you have a stop-over on your journey, you will probably need to arrange a different oxygen supply for the time you spend on the ground in between flights. Direct routes are easier for this reason.

**Portable concentrators**

- Some portable concentrators are easy to use on board planes and other modes of transport and can then be used during stop-overs as well. It is wise, however, to check that the company you are travelling with will allow your concentrator on board.

- You may need to book a seat near an appropriate power source so the concentrator batteries can continue to charge in transit. This is especially important for long journeys.

The Australian Lung Foundation has a booklet “Getting Started on Home Oxygen” that provides more useful information for those on home oxygen therapy. Call 1800 654 301 to order a copy.