Travelling with Crohn’s or Colitis

Having Crohn’s or Colitis should not stop you from travelling. Many people with Crohn’s or Colitis travel, both in the UK and overseas. Planning ahead can help your trip go as smoothly as possible. But there can be a lot of things to think about, and this can sometimes feel daunting.

This information is designed for anyone affected by Crohn’s or Colitis, whether you live with one of these conditions or you’re travelling with someone who does.

Our information can help you:

- Plan for a trip
- Pack for a trip
- Stay as well as possible while you travel
- Find out more about travelling with a stoma

This information has been written about Crohn’s Disease and Ulcerative Colitis using scientific research and public health advice. If you live with Microscopic Colitis, you may still find some of this information helpful.

If this information uses words you have not heard before, our page on medical words can help give an explanation.

Contents

Key points on travelling with Crohn's or Colitis

- If you're planning to travel outside the UK, you may need to be vaccinated against some of the serious diseases found in other parts of the world. If possible, try to plan your trip as far in advance as possible. You should see your GP or visit a travel clinic at least six to eight weeks before you go, but some travel vaccines may need to be given earlier than this. Planning well ahead can give you time to get health advice, order medicines and arrange any vaccinations you might need.
- Discuss your plans with your IBD team as far in advance as possible. It may be useful to ask what you should do if you have a flare-up while you're away.
- Shop around for travel insurance. Some companies specialise in insurance for people with medical conditions. Make sure your insurance covers your Crohn's or Colitis.
- Pack enough medicines or stoma supplies to last for your whole trip. If you can, pack extra in case you have any delays. Take a copy of your prescription or a letter from your IBD team or whoever provided your prescription about the medicine you take or need.
- Do your research and find out how to access healthcare where you're going, just in case.
- Check what facilities are available on your journey and at your destination. Tell your travel agent, airline, rail or coach company if you need extra support or have dietary needs.

Before going on your trip

If you're planning to travel outside the UK, you may need to be vaccinated against some of the serious diseases found in other parts of the world. If possible, try to plan your trip as far in advance as possible. You should see your GP or visit a travel clinic at least six to eight weeks before you go, but some travel vaccines may need to be given earlier than this.

Planning well ahead can give you time to get health advice, order medicines and arrange any vaccinations you might need.

You may wish to tell your IBD team during a routine appointment if you're planning to travel, especially if you are going overseas. They can give you advice about managing your Crohn's or Colitis while you are away. For information about vaccinations, talk to your GP or a private travel clinic.

Even if you're not planning a trip just yet, you could tell your IBD team if you want to travel to high-risk areas in the future. There are some vaccinations they might recommend you have before you start certain medicines for Crohn's or Colitis.

Travelling regularly or going away for a long time may affect which Crohn's or Colitis medicine is best suited to your lifestyle. Talk to your IBD team for advice on the best medicine for you. They may be able to recommend one that does not need to be kept in the fridge or one that may have long periods between doses. If you are travelling for a long time, you will need to think about where you can get your medicine from, and the rules and regulations around medicines in the country or countries you are visiting.

> **"As someone who regularly travels internationally for work, there are always added complications & anxieties caused by my Crohn's. From medication, potential flares and even the availability of non-triggering food at my destination, it is always important that I plan ahead and ensure I have fully considered my medical needs before travelling."**

Charlie

Living with Crohn's Disease

Choosing where to go and where to stay

You might already know exactly where you're going. But if you have not decided yet, there are some things you might want to think about.

- Do you want to travel in the UK or overseas? If you want to go overseas, what healthcare system do they have? How do you access it? You can find information for different countries at IBD Passport.
- Are any infections especially common where you plan to visit? Will you need any vaccinations? These might be important questions if you take medicine that affects your immune system. You can find out about infections and vaccination recommendations for different countries from TravelHealthPro.
- What facilities do you need? Are you happy to use shared toilet facilities, or do you need your own toilet? Do you need a fridge to store any medicines or liquid foods? Do you need laundry facilities? Ask your travel company or your accommodation provider what's available.
- What sort of food can you get where you plan to travel? Does this fit with your usual diet? If you have dietary needs and have food included with your booking, let your travel company or accommodation provider know.
- Is the water supply drinkable, or will you need to use bottled, boiled or sterilised water?
- What is the weather like where you are thinking of travelling? Some people find their Crohn's or Colitis get worse at certain times of year or during types of weather.

Choosing when to go

Try to plan your trip to allow plenty of time to have any vaccinations you need.

You are more likely to stay well on your trip if your Crohn's or Colitis has been under control for at least three months. However, we know that Crohn's and Colitis can be unpredictable, and you do not know when you might have a flare-up. This can make planning for a holiday difficult and uncertain. Some people may prefer to wait until their Crohn's or Colitis is in remission before planning to travel.

If you can, try to plan your trip so you will not need any routine blood tests while you're away. If this is not possible, you might be able to bring your tests forward so you're up-to-date before you go. Discuss this with whoever prescribes your medicine, such as your GP or IBD team.

Some people find their Crohn's or Colitis gets worse at certain times of year, or during types of weather. If this is the case for you, check what the weather is like where you're travelling at the time of year you're planning to go. Also, there may be times of the day when you feel at your best. You could try to travel during these times and avoid times when you might not feel so good.

Visiting attractions or venues

It's not always easy to get the support you need when out and about at attractions and venues. To help with this, we've created a letter to give to staff. It can help explain what it's like living with Crohn's or Colitis and the impact the conditions can have on days out.

The letter also suggests changes that attractions and venues can make to better support people living with Crohn's or Colitis.

Download our attractions and venues letter.

Getting travel vaccinations

If you are travelling to another country, you might need to have vaccinations before you go. The vaccinations you need will depend on where you are going. You can find out about the vaccinations you need by:

- Asking your GP

- Contacting a private travel clinic
- Visiting the TravelHealthPro website

You may need to pay for your travel vaccinations. But some vaccinations may be free. If you need to pay for your vaccinations, this cost should be thought of as an essential part of your trip.

When to get vaccinated

You should talk to your GP or a private travel clinic at least six to eight weeks before you travel. But some travel vaccines may need to be given earlier than this. For some vaccinations, you may need more than one dose. And some may take a while to work fully. Planning ahead can give you enough time to make sure you are fully vaccinated.

Vaccines and your medicines

When you book your travel vaccinations, tell the travel clinic staff you have Crohn's or Colitis, and what medicines you are taking. This might affect what vaccinations you can have.

Non-live vaccines

Non-live vaccines are suitable for people with Crohn's or Colitis. But if you take medicine that affects your immune system, your vaccine might not work as well as they do in other people. To know if your vaccination has worked, you may be able to have a blood test, known as a titre test, but this isn't usually needed. The healthcare professionals giving you the vaccine will be able to tell you if you need a titre test.

Live vaccines

Live vaccines might not be suitable for you if you're on medicines that affect your immune system.

Live vaccines are made from weakened versions of bacteria or viruses. If your immune system is lowered, live vaccines could cause serious infections. You should wait three to four weeks after a live vaccine before starting treatment that affects your immune system.

Talk to your GP, vaccination specialist or IBD team about what vaccinations you can have safely if you are on, or have recently had:

- **Biologic medicines, such as infliximab. A full list of these medicines can be found in our biologic medicines information**
- **JAK inhibitors, such as tofacitinib, filgotinib or upadictinib.**
- **Ozanimod or etrasimod.**
- **High-dose or medium-dose steroids. The dose that counts as 'high' or 'medium' depends on the exact steroid you are taking. Your GP or IBD team will be able to tell you.**
- **Azathioprine or mercaptopurine.**
- **Methotrexate.**

You may also want to ask if you need to take precautions if you are in close contact with anyone who has recently had a live vaccine.

Live vaccinations you might need before travelling to certain places include:

- The typhoid vaccine. This comes in two forms. The capsule you can swallow, called Ty21a, is a live vaccine. However, there is a non-live injection version that may be suitable for patients on some IBD medications.
- The yellow fever vaccine. To visit some countries, you must have proof of yellow fever vaccination.
  - If you have already been vaccinated against yellow fever, check your vaccine certificate. The details must match the details on your passport. If you have changed your name or gender, you will need to get a new certificate.
  - If you have not already been vaccinated against yellow fever and you cannot have the live vaccine, your GP or travel clinic might advise you to

    avoid travelling to places where yellow fever is common. If you do choose to go, you may need a medical exemption letter. A yellow fever vaccination centre or your GP may be able to provide this. Some countries might accept this medical exemption instead of proof of vaccination. But some countries might not, and they could refuse to let you in.
  - If you are not vaccinated and you travel to a place where yellow fever is common, you are at risk of catching it. Your GP or travel clinic may give you advice on how to avoid mosquito bites, or you can find out more information on yellow fever on the NHS website.
- The BCG vaccine that protects against tuberculosis (TB). If you get TB, you might not have any symptoms. This is called latent, or sleeping, TB. If you travel for a month or more to a place where TB is common, your doctor might suggest testing you for latent TB a few weeks after you get back. This is because some medicines for Crohn’s or Colitis can reactivate latent TB. If you have latent TB, it must be treated before you have treatment with biologic medicines. If you are diagnosed with TB, you may need medicines to treat you for three to six months.

There may be other live vaccines that you need to be given. Always speak to your GP or travel clinic about the vaccines you need before travelling.

Malaria tablets

Malaria is a serious infection spread by mosquitoes. There is no vaccination to prevent malaria. Having Crohn’s or Colitis does not seem to increase your risk of getting it. If you are travelling to an area where malaria is common, your doctor or travel clinic will recommend that you take anti-malarial tablets. You can find out about the risk of malaria for each country on the Travel Health Pro website.

You can find out how to avoid malaria, including how to reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes, on the government website. You can also read our **avoiding insect bites** information in our **staying well on your trip** section.

There are lots of different anti-malarial tablets. Some of them might interact with some medicines for Crohn’s and Colitis. Your doctor or travel clinic can recommend anti-malarial tablets that are suitable for you. You will need to start most anti-malarial tablets a few days or weeks before you travel. It's important that you continue taking this medicine when you return from travelling. This may be for up to four weeks after you get back, depending on the medicine. Always read the leaflet that comes with your medicine to understand how to take it and for how long.

Anti-malarial tablets are not available on the NHS and so are not free. You will need to pay for your anti-malarial tablets. If you need them, the cost should be thought of as an essential part of your trip.

Getting travel insurance

If you are travelling outside the UK, it's important to get travel insurance that covers you for Crohn's or Colitis. To do this, you need to declare that you have Crohn's or Colitis when you get your quote.

It's sensible to buy travel insurance, even if you are feeling well or have been in remission for a while. If you are staying in the UK, it's still a good idea to consider insurance in case you have to cancel your holiday because of your Crohn's or Colitis.

If you choose to travel without insurance, or your policy excludes Crohn's and Colitis, you might have to pay a lot if you need medical care. Healthcare in some countries can be very expensive.

UK Global Health Insurance (UK GHIC) card

If you are travelling in the European Economic Area and some other countries, you can get a health insurance card. This free card gives you access to state-provided healthcare for:

- Emergency treatment and visits to A&E
- Treatment or routine medical care for long-term or pre-existing medical conditions
- Routine maternity care, so long as you're not going abroad to give birth

This care may be free, or it may cost the same as a local resident would pay. It does not include other costs, such as emergency travel if you need to be transported back to the UK.

The UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) has replaced the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). If you have an EHIC card, you can continue to use it until its expiry date. Once it expires, you can apply for a GHIC instead.

These health insurance cards are not a substitute for travel insurance. It's a good idea to have both to be fully covered.

Find out more, including which countries you can use the GHIC card, on the NHS website.

Declaring your Crohn's or Colitis

Travel insurance may sometimes cost more if you have Crohn's or Colitis. But it's important to declare that you have it, even if it's been under control for a long time. Otherwise, your policy might not cover emergency medical costs.

If you are currently being diagnosed, speak to your travel insurance company to ask if they are still able to provide cover, or if they need any additional information.

If your health or medicine has changed since you took out the travel insurance, you may need to tell your insurance company so that their records are up-to-date, and your insurance still covers you.

When you declare you have a medical condition, you may need to answer questions about it. The travel insurance company may want to know details about your health. This helps the insurance company work out how likely you are to make a claim. This can affect how much they charge for your policy. The cost is based on your medical conditions, but also:

- Your age
- Where you're going
- How long you'll travel for

Some insurance companies might ask you for a letter from your GP confirming that you're fit to travel. Your doctor might charge you for this letter.

Finding travel insurance

Prices can vary a lot between insurance companies. It may be worthwhile shopping around to find out what cover is available. If you already have an annual multi-trip travel insurance policy, you could check if it covers your Crohn's or Colitis. If not, you might be able to pay extra to extend the cover.

- MoneyHelper is a government service that includes a directory of companies that specialise in travel insurance for people with medical conditions.
- The British Insurance Brokers' Association also has a directory of companies that provide travel insurance for people with medical conditions.

If you need to make a claim

If you need to claim on your travel insurance, you'll need to have receipts for everything. This may include things like taxi fares to the hospital or healthcare centre, healthcare receipts or prescription receipts.

Travelling with medicines

Try to take enough medicines for your whole trip, plus extra in case of delays. This includes any over-the-counter medicines you usually take. Some places have restrictions on what medicines you're allowed to bring into the country. Check with the embassy of the country you're visiting before you travel.

When to take your medicines

If you are travelling across different time zones, it can be difficult to work out when to take your medicines. You could carry on taking them based on the time it is in the UK. Or you could gradually adjust the time you take them to suit the time zone you are in. You might find it helpful to set an alarm to remind you when to take your dose. Or maybe download an app to remind you to take your medicine. If you're not sure when to take them, ask your IBD team or pharmacist for advice.

Taking medicines overseas

- **Ask your doctor or pharmacist if your medicine contains a controlled drug. If it does, contact the embassy of the country you're travelling to so you can find out if you need any forms or additional permissions.**
- **You might need to take a copy of your prescription and a covering letter from your GP or whoever prescribes your medicine.**
- **Take your medicines in their original packaging, including the patient information leaflet.**
- **If you are flying, you may be restricted to 100ml volumes of liquid. Check with the airline and airport you are using. If you need to take more, you may need a copy of your prescription or a letter from whoever prescribes your medicine. This includes oral liquids, injections, gels, cream, pastes and liquid foods.**
- **Keep injectable medicine in your hand luggage. Checked-in luggage goes in the aeroplane hold, which can reach very low temperatures. Some medicines could freeze and become less effective.**

Travelling with biologic medicines

Biologic medicines need to be stored in the fridge. It is OK to keep them at room temperature for short periods, but the exact length of time depends on which biologic you take. You can find out how long your medicine will last out of the fridge in the patient information leaflet or on the electronic medicines compendium.

For some biologics, you should not put your medicine back in the fridge if it's reached room temperature. If your medicine needs to be kept cold while you're travelling, you could use a cool bag or a cooling wallet. You can buy these online or from pharmacies.

If you are flying, you are allowed to take needles, syringes or injectable pens in your hand luggage. You will need a copy of your prescription or a letter from the healthcare professionals who provide your prescription. It's a good idea to tell your airline in advance in case they have any additional restrictions. They might take your medicines and equipment to store them safely in the cabin during the flight. Checked-in luggage goes in the aeroplane hold, which can reach very low temperatures. Some medicines could freeze and become less effective.

You could buy a travel-sized sharps bin to dispose of your needles safely.

Travelling into the UK

If you're not a UK resident, you will need a letter to show that your medicine has been prescribed for you.

The letter must include:

- Your name
- The dates you are travelling to and from the UK
- A list of your medicine, including how much you have, doses and the strength
- The signature of the person who prescribed your medicines

You can only bring up to three months' supply of your medicine with you.

Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you if your medicine contains a controlled drug. You can also check the drugs listed on the packaging of your medicine and search for them on the controlled drugs list.

You can find out more about bringing medicines into the UK on the UK Government website.

Travelling on a liquid diet

Talk to your dietitian or GP if you are planning to travel while on a liquid diet. They can advise you on what you need to do and help make sure you have the supplies you need. Make sure you have enough for your whole trip. Powdered products are easier to carry and take up less space in your luggage. But make sure the water you use to mix them is safe to drink.

If you are flying with ready-mixed liquid foods, you are allowed to take these in your hand luggage. You will need a copy of your prescription or a letter from your doctor. It's a good idea to tell your airline in advance, especially if the amount you need will take you over the usual hand luggage allowance. You might have to go through extra security checks.

Travelling with a stoma

Having a stoma should not stop you from travelling, but it may take a bit more planning. Ask your stoma nurse for any tips or the most suitable products based on what you plan to do while you're away. You might need a change in your prescription.

Your stoma supplies

Order plenty of stoma supplies before you go. You may need more than usual, especially if you're going somewhere hot or eating different foods. If you're planning to be away for a long time, you could check if your supply company deliver where you're going.

We offer a stoma supply home delivery service, in partnership with Bullen Healthcare, an independent dispensing appliance contractor. Visit Crohn's & Colitis Healthcare Direct for more information.

Where to pack your stoma supplies

If you're flying, it's sensible to pack your stoma supplies in your hand luggage if you can. This is in case your checked-in bags go missing. If you tell your airline in advance, they might be able to increase your luggage allowance. You will not be able to take scissors in your hand luggage. If you need to cut your bags or flanges to fit, do this before you travel.

> **"When travelling, I pack several little 'kits'. Each one will contain everything I need in case I get into a pickle with my stoma. I then pack one in my hand luggage, one in my partner's and bigger ones in each**

of our cases....just in case a piece of luggage goes missing!"

Rebecca

Living with Ulcerative Colitis

Airport security

Each airport may have its own security procedures. Below are some hints and tips to help you through the security check.

- Before you go through security, you may want to change your stoma bag, just in case you need to be searched.
- It's helpful to have a certificate or a letter from your GP to explain that you have a stoma and the supplies you need to carry. You can show this at airport security. Colostomy UK have a PDF template you can use, or your stoma nurse or stoma supply company may be able to supply one. This will need to be signed or stamped by your GP surgery. You might have to pay for this.
- Many airports offer sunflower lanyards to show that you have an invisible disability. You can usually get these from the airport's assistance point. This may help the security team identify that you have an invisible disability.
- Your stoma bag may be detected by some security scanners. If needed, security staff may ask to carry out an extra hand-search. You can ask for this to be done in a private room by a security staff member of the same sex as you. You can also ask for a friend or family member to be in the room while the search is carried.

Tips for flying with a stoma

The change in air pressure when you fly can make any gas in your body expand. This can lead to tummy pain or may cause more wind in your bag than usual. It might help to avoid fizzy drinks before you fly.

While you're away, you can empty your bags into the toilet, put them in a disposal bag and throw them away in an ordinary bin.

For more information, including hints and tips on managing air travel with a stoma:

- Colostomy UK have travel advice for people with a stoma.
- The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association (IA) produce a booklet of travel tips for people with a stoma (PDF).

Longer-term travelling

Long-term travelling with Crohn's and Colitis can be challenging, but it is possible with careful planning.

> **"I have lived with Crohn's Disease for many years now. In spite of this, I am a keen and active traveller. I like to explore remote places, and I am not deterred from there being a lack of amenities and facilities."**
>
> **Melvyn**
> Living with Crohn's

Your medicine and care while travelling long-term

If you're travelling outside the UK, the prescriber of your medicine should be able to prescribe enough medicines to last up to three months, if they think this is safe. If you are travelling for longer, you will need to arrange more supplies. You may be able to get a prescription from a local doctor in the country you are visiting. Or you may be able to get a private prescription from your usual doctor and get your extra supplies from a UK pharmacy before you travel. This will not be covered on the NHS.

Ask your IBD team for advice if you're thinking of travelling long-term.

Getting medical help abroad

- IBD Passport has details of IBD clinics in other countries. This only includes IBD clinics that have registered with the website. It does not list all IBD clinics. You must register to use this, but it is free and quick to do

- The Foreign Office has a list of English-speaking medical facilities in other countries. It does not include all doctors or health centres.

If you will need blood tests or an infusion while you are away, talk to your IBD team. They might be able to refer you to a hospital or health centre at your destination. Contact the centre in advance to find out what you need to do. You are likely to have to pay for tests or treatment outside the UK.

IBD Passport has more information on accessing healthcare abroad. You must register to do this.

Packing for your trip

As well as medicines and stoma supplies, there are extra things you might need to pack if you're travelling with Crohn's or Colitis.

Documents

If you have them, it's a good idea to take:

- A copy of your prescription for all your medicines or stoma supplies, or a letter from the healthcare professional that gives you your prescription. Prescriptions are often electronic. You might need to ask for a paper copy.
- A letter from your GP or IBD team confirming your diagnosis and the medicines you are on.
- Your flare-up plan. You could ask your IBD team for one if you do not already have one.
- A steroid card or MedicAlert bracelet, if you are on steroids.
- A medical alert card or a patient reminder card for your medicine, if you were given one. These contain important safety information about your medicine.
- Your travel insurance policy, GHIC card or EHIC card.
- Contact details for your IBD team.
- Your vaccination record.

- Contact details of a doctor or IBD clinic where you are travelling. You could also give these details to the people you're travelling with, in case they need to help you get medical care. You can find a list of IBD clinics abroad on the IBD passport website.
- A Crohn's & Colitis UK Can't Wait Card. This is available in 29 different languages. Members can get translated cards by emailing membership@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk.

It might also be helpful to take a summary of your medical needs. You could take a list of useful words or phrases about Crohn's or Colitis in the local language, such as 'where are the toilets?' or 'where is the nearest hospital?'. And our all about Crohn's and Colitis information is available to download in six different languages.

Emergency travel kit

Some people pack an emergency kit in case they have an accident. This could include:

- Wipes, tissues or toilet roll
- Disposable gloves
- Hand sanitiser
- A change of clothes
- A bag for dirty clothes
- Sanitary disposal bags
- Barrier cream for sore skin
- Air freshener

> **"We had always travelled the world, and when my son was diagnosed with Crohn's at the age of 16, we were worried it would stop our adventures, but with the help of the Crohn's & Colitis website and his IBD team, we continued to navigate the globe for the next ten years! Forward planning, the right**

paperwork and ensuring accommodation had fridges for injections we had amazing holidays!"

Angela – parent of son with Crohn's

Getting there

However you decide to travel, there are extra things to think about when you're living with Crohn's or Colitis.

Avoiding blood clots

People living with Crohn's or Colitis have a higher risk of getting blood clots than other people. Blood clots are more likely to develop when you sit still for a long time. This includes long-haul flights or long journeys on the train or by car. Your risk may be higher if you have had surgery recently, such as in the last four weeks. You may also be at higher risk of blood clots during a flare-up.

You can find out more about blood clots on the NHS website or from Thrombosis UK.

To help prevent blood clots when travelling, you could:

- Wear loose, comfortable clothes.
- Choose an aisle seat, if you can, to give yourself more room. Make sure your luggage does not restrict your leg movement.
- Walk around every few hours. This could be up and down the aisle of an aeroplane or train, or during stops if you're travelling by road.
- Stretch your feet and ankles and flex your calf muscles often, even if you're sitting still.
- Stay hydrated but avoid drinking alcohol.
- Think about wearing travel compression stockings. You can buy these from pharmacies or airports. Ask the pharmacist for advice on the right size for you and if there are any reasons you should not wear them.

Signs of blood clots can include:

- **Breathlessness**
- **Chest pain**
- **Coughing up blood**
- **Throbbing pain, usually in the calf or thigh, when you walk or stand.**
- **Swelling in one leg, or more rarely, both legs.**
- **Warm skin around the painful area.**
- **Skin that becomes red or darkened around the painful area. This may be harder to see on brown or Black skin.**
- **Swollen veins that are hard or sore when you touch them.**

Get medical help as soon as possible if you notice any of these signs. These symptoms can also happen in your arm or tummy if that's where the blood clot is.

Travelling by road

If you've had surgery recently, your surgical team can advise you on when it is safe to drive. This may depend on:

- How well you've recovered from the surgery and the anaesthetic
- If you have any pain or other symptoms that could affect your driving
- If you need to take any painkillers that might affect your driving

You should also check with your car insurance company to make sure you are covered to drive after surgery. If you are travelling as a passenger after surgery, it's sensible to make sure you can move around easily and sit comfortably before going on a trip.

Getting a blue badge

Blue Badges let you park closer to where you're going, often free or at a reduced cost. Some people with Crohn's or Colitis might be able to get a Blue Badge. Having Crohn's or

Colitis may not automatically mean you can have a Blue Badge. Getting a blue badge may depend on:

- Where you live
- If you get certain benefits
- How hard you find it to walk

You can apply for a Blue Badge online or through your local council:

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

You might find it helpful to use Crohn's & Colitis UK's letter of support for applications.

If you have a Blue Badge, you can check online to find out where you can park in the UK. You can also use it in many European countries. The government has a list of European countries where you can use your Blue Badge. Some countries outside Europe also recognise the Blue Badge scheme. The FIA Foundation and BlueBadgeParking.com have information on parking in other countries.

Finding toilets

If you're travelling by road, you might want to check what toilet facilities there are on your route. The Great British Toilet Map is a searchable website of public toilets in the UK. There are also lots of mobile apps that help you find accessible toilets. Some of these are worldwide and others cover particular countries. You can search "toilet finder" in your app store to find an app that suits you.

> **"It can cause me a lot of anxiety not knowing where the toilets are when out and about. Having an app that tells me where the nearest one is gives me peace of mind."**
>
> **Josh**
>
> Living with Ulcerative Colitis

Some accessible public toilets are kept locked. You might need a Radar key to open these. Crohn's & Colitis UK members can request a Radar key as part of their membership package. You can also buy keys from Disability Rights UK. These keys work in the UK. Some other countries have a similar scheme. You can buy keys for these from the Radar Key Company too.

Some people take a travel toilet on long car journeys, just in case.

If you're travelling by bus or coach, you could contact the company to check if there is a toilet on board. You may want to find out if you can book an aisle seat close to it.

Local Travel Cards

If you're disabled, you may be eligible for discounted travel on local buses. See the information for your nation:

- England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales

Travelling by train

If you're travelling by rail, you can get extra support, such as help carrying your luggage or getting on and off the train. You can ask for this when you arrive at the station, but it is a good idea to request it in advance. You can do this using National Rail's Passenger Assist service. For train journeys within the UK, you should request support at least two hours before you travel. For international train journeys, you should request support at least 48 hours before you travel.

Your train operating company may be able to tell you if there are any toilets on your train. If you can, you may want to pre-book an aisle seat near the toilets. You can also check what facilities are available at the station.

If you receive disability benefits, such as Personal Independence Payments (PIP), you might be eligible for a Disabled Persons Railcard. This gives you money off rail travel in the UK.

See the information for your nation:

- England
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Wales

Travelling by plane

If you're flying, you could contact your airline, tour operator or travel agent to find out what support they can offer. You might be able to pre-book a seat near a toilet or increase your luggage allowance, especially if you're taking lots of bulky medicines or equipment. Let them know what support you need before you travel. You might need to provide a letter from your GP or IBD team. Make sure you allow enough time for this.

Tell your airline if you have any specific dietary needs.

Showing you have an invisible disability

Many airports offer sunflower lanyards to show that you have an invisible disability. You can usually get these from the airport's assistance point. These may allow you to access priority lanes if you are not able to queue.

If you have a Can't Wait Card, you could try showing it to the cabin crew, who may give you access to other toilets, should you need it.

Flying after surgery

The UK Civil Aviation Authority recommends that you do not fly for 10 days after having abdominal surgery. This is to reduce your risk of complications. You are likely to need a 'fit-to-fly' certificate or medical information form from your GP if you plan to fly sooner. You usually pay for this.

Talk to your surgeon, GP or IBD team about your risk of developing blood clots if you are flying within four weeks of surgery.

Jet lag and fatigue

It's common to experience fatigue if you live with Crohn's or Colitis. If your normal sleep pattern is affected by a long-haul flight, it can cause jet lag. This can cause tiredness and exhaustion. You can reduce the effects of jet lag by:

Before you travel:

- Getting plenty of rest
- Shifting the times you go to bed and wake up closer to the time zone of the place you're travelling to.

During the flight:

- Stay hydrated
- Walking around the cabin and stretching
- Sleep if it's nighttime at your destination
- Wear earplugs or use a sleep mask if you need to
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol

After the flight:

- Change your bedtime to the new time zone as quickly as possible
- Use an alarm to make sure you don't oversleep
- Get plenty of natural light to help your body adjust

Staying well on your trip

Travelling can be exciting and rewarding, but it can also be tiring. Try to give yourself time to relax and rest if you need to. It's just as important to look after yourself when you're away as it is at home. Make sure you remember to take your medicines.

If you know certain foods make your symptoms worse, try to stick to things you usually eat at home. Some people worry about having an accident while they're away. You could take a towel or a disposable bed pad to put under you while you sleep.

You might find our information on fatigue, food and living with Crohn's or Colitis helpful.

> **"Travelling with Crohn's or Colitis also means having plan A, B & C. It can mean doing one activity and needing to go back to your hotel room to rest. It can mean saying no to visiting a monument because you know there's no toilet facilities near. It can mean missing out on staple foods of the country you're in."**
>
> **Alicia**
> Living with Colitis

Managing flares

Flare-ups are unpredictable. In some people, travelling to a different country, eating different food, being in a different climate or being at high altitude can trigger flare-ups. So it is best to be prepared. Before you go, discuss your plans with your IBD team as far in advance as possible. It may be useful to ask what you should do if you have a flare-up while you're away.

If you need medical help while you're away, you could:

- Contact your insurance company if you have travel insurance. They can help you arrange medical treatment.
- Check the IBD Passport network for information on how to access healthcare in other countries. You must register to do this, but it is free and quick to do.
- Check the Foreign Office advice for the country you're in. For many countries, it has information on how to get medical help.
- Contact the nearest British Consul. They can help you find a local doctor.

Traveller's diarrhoea

Anyone travelling overseas is at risk of getting traveller's diarrhoea. Having Crohn's or Colitis does not seem to make you more likely to get traveller's diarrhoea. But if you do get it, it might be more severe or last longer than in other people.

Reducing the risk of traveller's diarrhoea

There are a few things you can do to reduce your risk of getting traveller's diarrhoea:

- Wash your hands well with soap and water before eating and after going to the toilet. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitiser until you can wash your hands properly.
- Use bottled, boiled or sterilised water to drink, brush your teeth or prepare food.
- Avoid ice in drinks.
- Avoid salads and raw fruit or vegetables, unless you wash or peel them yourself.
- Avoid unpasteurised fruit juices or dairy products, including ice cream. Pasteurised products are OK.
- Make sure meat or fish is thoroughly cooked. Avoid shellfish.
- Avoid food that has been left uncovered or kept warm.
- Avoid street food, unless it is freshly cooked in front of you and is piping hot.
- Try not to swallow any water if you go to a swimming pool, hot tub, spa or waterpark.

TravelHealthPro has more information on travellers' diarrhoea and food and water hygiene for travellers.

Managing traveller's diarrhoea

Most cases of traveller's diarrhoea get better within a few days. If you get traveller's diarrhoea, here are some things that might help:

- Stay hydrated and avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- Take oral rehydration salts if you are losing a lot of fluid. You may be able to buy these from pharmacies or supermarkets. Make sure the water you mix them with is safe to drink.

- Carry on eating normally if you can. You might find easy-to-digest foods, like bananas or rice, are gentler on your tummy.
- Consider taking anti-diarrhoeal medicines. **But you should not take anti-diarrhoeal medicines if you are:**
  - **In a flare**
  - **If you have a high temperature**
  - **If you have blood in your poo**

  You may not be able to take anti-diarrhoeal medicines if you have a narrowing in your bowel called a stricture. Ask your IBD team if these are suitable for you to take.

There are more tips on managing vomiting and diarrhoea on the NHS website.

Depending on where you are travelling, your GP or IBD team might prescribe a course of antibiotics that you can start taking if you get traveller's diarrhoea. This is not common and will not be needed for most travellers. If you are given antibiotics, you should be advised when to take them or when to ask for medical advice on when to take them.

For more suggestions on how to cope with diarrhoea and constipation, see our information on diarrhoea and constipation.

Get medical advice if:

- **You have bloody diarrhoea**
- **You have lots of watery diarrhoea**
- **You have a persistently high temperature**
- **You have severe tummy pain**
- **You are dehydrated**
- **Your symptoms do not get better within 24 to 48 hours**

Dehydration

If you're in a hot country, you have diarrhoea or you're exercising a lot, you'll need to drink more than usual to avoid dehydration. Symptoms can include:

- Thirst
- A dry mouth
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Dark-coloured wee

It's important to drink plenty of non-alcoholic drinks. Try to avoid being very active in the hottest part of the day.

You might like to read our separate information on dehydration.

Avoiding insect bites

Insects can spread infections, including malaria. Try to avoid being bitten if you can, especially if you are taking medicines that lower your immune system.

To help protect yourself from insect bites, you could:

- Wear loose, long-sleeved tops and long trousers
- Wear socks and shoes
- Use insect repellent
- Sleep under a mosquito net
- Put sunscreen on first, if you need to use both sunscreen and insect repellent

TravelHealthPro has more information on avoiding insect bites.

Staying safe in the sun

Some medicines used to treat Crohn's or Colitis can make your skin more sensitive to sun damage and might increase your risk of skin cancer. Everyone needs to protect themselves from the effects of the sun. But it is especially important if you are taking Crohn's or Colitis medicines that affect your immune system.

You can protect your skin from the sun by:

- Staying in the shade when you can, particularly between 11am and 3pm.
- Covering up with suitable clothing, such as long-sleeved tops, trousers or a long skirt. Wearing sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat may also help.
- Using sunscreen that is factor 30 or more, with a 4-star or 5-star UVA rating. For it to work well, you should reapply it at least every two hours. You should also reapply it after swimming, exercising or drying yourself with a towel.
- Trying to stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm.

The NHS and TravelHealthPro have more information on sun protection.

Other organisations

Accessible Travel Hub: A place for you to find information, articles and guidance about accessible travel in Scotland.

Association of British Travel Agents**:** Useful travel information, including specific advice for disabled travellers.

Civil Aviation Authority: The UK's aviation regulator has information about flying.

Colostomy UK: A charity supporting and empowering people living with a stoma.

Foreign embassies in the UK.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**:** Travel advice and information on how to access government help in other countries.

How to apply for a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC).

IA (the Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association): A national support group for people living with an ileostomy or internal pouch, their families, friends and carers.

IBD Passport: One-stop travel advice and information for people with Crohn's or Colitis.

Radar Key Company: The company that makes and sells Radar keys for accessible toilets.

Tourism for All**:** A national charity providing information on accessible travel.

TravelHealthPro: Information from the UK Health Security Agency on health and travel abroad.

World Health Organization: The United Nations agency that promotes healthier lives and coordinates the world's response to health emergencies.

Who to talk to if you're worried

Taking medicines and managing side effects can be difficult – we understand and we're here to help. Our Helpline can answer general questions about treatment options and can help you find support from others with the conditions. Your IBD team are also there to help. You can talk to them about your dosage, how they'll be monitoring you and what other options there might be. You should also get in touch with your IBD team if you have any new symptoms or side effects. It can take time to find the medicine that's right for you. Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek out extra support when you need it. This information is general and does not replace specific advice from your health professional. Talk to your GP or IBD team for information that's specific to you.

Help and support from Crohn's & Colitis UK

We're here for you whenever you need us. Our information covers a wide range of topics. From treatment options to symptoms, relationship concerns to employment issues, our information can help you manage your condition. We'll help you find answers, access support and take control.

All information is available on our website.

Helpline service

Our helpline team provides up-to-date, evidence-based information. You can find out more on our helpline web page. Our team can support you to live well with Crohn's or Colitis.

Our Helpline team can help by:

- Providing information about Crohn's and Colitis
- Listening and talking through your situation
- Helping you to find support from others in the Crohn's and Colitis community
- Providing details of other specialist organisations

You can call the Helpline on 0300 222 5700. You can also visit our livechat service. Lines are open 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, except English bank holidays.

You can email helpline@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk at any time. The Helpline will aim to respond to your email within three working days.

Our helpline also offers a language interpretation service, which allows us to speak to callers in their preferred language.

Social events and Local Networks

You can find support from others in the Crohn's and Colitis community through our virtual social events. There may also be a Local Network in your area offering in-person social events. Visit our Crohn's and Colitis UK in your area webpage to find out what is available.

Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum

This closed-group Facebook community is for anyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis. You can share your experiences and receive support from others. Find out more about the Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum.

Help with toilet access when out

There are many benefits to becoming a member of Crohn's & Colitis UK. One of these is a free RADAR key to unlock accessible toilets. Another is a Can't Wait Card. This card shows that you have a medical condition. It will help when you are out and need urgent access to the toilet. See our membership webpage for more information. Or you can call the Membership Team on 01727 734465.

Crohn's & Colitis UK is a national charity, leading the fight against Crohn's and Colitis. We're here for everyone affected by these conditions.

Our vision is to see improved lives today and a world free from Crohn's and Colitis tomorrow. We seek to improve diagnosis and treatment, fund research into a cure, raise awareness and give people hope and confidence to live freer, fuller lives.

Our information is available thanks to the generosity of our supporters and members. Find out how you can join the fight against Crohn's and Colitis by calling **01727 734465.** Or you can visit our website.

About our information

We follow strict processes to make sure our information is based on up-to-date evidence and is easy to understand. We produce it with patients, medical advisers and other professionals. It is not intended to replace advice from your own healthcare professional.

You can find out more on **our website.**

We hope that you've found this information helpful. Please email us at evidence@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk if:

- You have any comments or suggestions for improvements
- You would like more information about the evidence we use
- You would like details of any conflicts of interest

You can also write to us at **Crohn's & Colitis UK, 1 Bishops Square, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9NE.** Or you can contact us through the **Helpline** on **0300 222 5700**.

We do not endorse any products mentioned in our information.

CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

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