

- Ask for a seat close to the toilet as you will not be able to take your oxygen in with you.
- If at all possible fly business or first class.

### **There are many oxygen providers throughout the world.**

When planning to travel see your specialist and get a letter listing:

- Your ability to see/hear alarms and respond appropriately.
- When oxygen use is necessary (all or a portion of the trip).
- Maximum flow rate corresponding to the pressure in the cabin under normal operating conditions.
- Hours per day needed.
- Take with you the contact details of your provider.
- You will find different types of cylinders in different places. Some cylinders have a flow meter that adjusts from two litres to eight litres, while others offer either a low flow 2 litres per minute or high flow 4 litres per minute.
- You cannot check oxygen containers with baggage, but most airlines will allow you to carry an empty portable tank either on board or with checked luggage. However, always check what your airline will allow well in advance of your travel.

### **Tips for planning air travel**

- Start by checking with your physician to make sure it is safe for you to travel by air
- Use a Travel Agent to organise the airline and oxygen bookings.
- Contact the airline you want to use as far in advance as possible.
- The arrangements are best made through their special services or medical department.

Tell them what you require in flight oxygen check their requirements.

- Find out what flow they can deliver and if they provide a mask or nasal cannula. Some airlines only provide a mask but will allow you to provide your own cannula.
- Confirm the arrangements 48 hours prior to your flight.
- Have fun and enjoy your trip!

*Scleroderma Australia wishes to acknowledge Dr Wendy Stevens and Dr Matthew Conron for their advice in the preparation of this brochure.*

**DISCLAIMER:** Scleroderma Victoria Inc. in no way endorses any of the medications or treatments reported in this brochure. The information is intended only to keep you informed. We strongly advise that you consult your doctor regarding any medications or treatments of interest to you.

# TRAVELLING WITH SCLERODERMA

This brochure aims to make your plans and travel as stress-free as possible, and also as rewarding and exciting as it should be.

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**scleroderma australia**  
support • education • research

*The effects of scleroderma can be very different from person to person. This brochure is designed to be a guide, not everything written here will be applicable to all patients— take the advice that is appropriate for you.*

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Travelling with a chronic illness can be challenging, and travelling long distances overseas when you have scleroderma can have some hurdles, but others have done this successfully.

### **Plan your Trip – Consult your specialist**

- The first port of call when planning your overseas trip is to visit your senior treating specialist to discuss your plans.
- You will be given a thorough examination and all tests deemed necessary will be arranged.
- The result of this examination and tests will enable your specialist to give you an expert opinion as to the suitability for you to travel.
- If necessary, your specialist may recommend that you wait until your condition “settles”.
- Once you receive the approval, obtain a letter from your specialist stating that you are fit to travel and a list of all medications you are taking.

### **Insurance**

Using an Insurance Broker is recommended as they are experts in their field and can help you complete the application process.

### **Speak to the airlines**

There are only restrictions on liquids, not tablets, when travelling. Discuss with the airline any special requirements needed for boarding the aircraft. If your doctor feels you need oxygen therapy on the flight, this will need to be arranged well in advance with the airline. Also pre-request dietary needs.

Remember, you will have to get off the plane at any stopovers. International airports are often very large with long distances between checking-in, boarding and customs etc.

If you have difficulty walking long distances, discuss with your airline wheelchair assistance at arrival and gate. This should be booked in advance. Oxygen will need to be organised and booked for each ‘leg’ of the journey.

### **Medications**

- As prescriptions are only valid in Australia you will need to take all medications with you and ensure they are kept secure.
- You will need to take a copy of each prescription for clearance with Customs.
- Ensure that you have enough medications for your entire travels.
- Remember, ask your doctor for a list of all prescribed medications in case of emergency.
- Pack all medications in hand luggage in case checked luggage is lost.

### **Handy Hints**

- If possible on a long journey plan a few stopovers on the way.
- Discuss with your doctor taking an emergency supply of antibiotics if you are prone to recurrent infections. Whilst flying make sure you stretch out by walking from time to time and massage your legs for circulation.
- Wear special stockings if you get leg swelling (“flight socks” or “TED stockings”).
- Book your hotel ahead and consider paying extra for an early check-in if necessary.
- Staying at a hotel in the centre of a city can be a big advantage whilst sightseeing. The extra cost can be saved on transport (e.g. taxis) and you can go to your hotel in the afternoons to rest.
- Travel slowly and consider using trains, which are much more relaxing than catching a flight.

- **Be aware that in many overseas hotels the shower is over the bath.** Check that your room has a walk-in shower rather than a bath for ease of access if you have problems getting in and out of baths.

### **Travelling with Oxygen**

- Car travel cylinders should be either strapped into a spare seat or put securely behind the front seats.
- A concentrator can be used for car travel.

### **Flying with Oxygen**

- A High Altitude Simulation Test (HAST) replicates the cabin conditions during a flight when the oxygen concentration drops from 21% to 15%. During this test it is determined if an individual will require additional oxygen to be comfortable and safe during the flight.
- For those who are already on oxygen, a flow rate 1 litre per minute above what is normally used is recommended for flying.
- For individuals not normally requiring oxygen, but who have lung disease, ask your specialist if a HAST is required.
- Oxygen cylinders can be organised by the patient through their supplier for domestic flights, with an approved carry bag for travel. Each airline is particular about what equipment is needed/approved. For international flights, arrangements can be made with the airline prior to the flight at a cost.
- Find an oxygen provider to purchase a portable concentrator, which can work in three ways: from a cigarette lighter socket; from mains power; using batteries (extra batteries in pack) which all sit in a trolley. You will need to carry charging equipment.
- When flying to international destinations find out what electrical connections are used. Some have USA or European sockets, and you may need an adaptor.