

## Advice on Travelling with CPAP

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The following are some useful tips when travelling with your CPAP machine (Even for short flights and not requiring use on board).

### 1) Preparation

a) Ensure that your CPAP machine and cables are carried as hand baggage. This is in case bags are lost, delayed etc. Repatriation of bags can sometimes take a number of days.

b) Ensure that you have a letter from you Consultant or Sleep Specialist that you are prescribed CPAP and that you are required to carry medical equipment.

### 2) Items to pack

a) Carry with you either as hand luggage or checked in hold baggage an extension cable. Many hotels are now converting their electrical systems in bedrooms to hard wiring points for bedside lights. This means that the nearest plug point (usually at the writing desk) is located some distance from the bed. Also carry with you a multi adaptor as plug points vary considerably around the world. The “*World AC Plug/socket adapter*” see *fig1* available from Amazon or good electrical retailers (Comet/Currrys/Dixons etc.) It is also compact and priced about £12. Most hotels are accommodating and will help to supply an extension cable, however, they usually tend to be industrial, unwieldy and very long cables designed for conference rooms and somewhat impractical



Fig1 - *World AC Plug/socket adapter*

*Photo courtesy Amazon*

### 4) Inform the Airline

**(As CPAP is essential medical equipment there should not be a charge – this depends on the company but you should challenge a request for payment)** Inform your travel agent that you have a CPAP machine and need to be accessible to a power point. Many newer aircraft are now installing power points in aircraft seats to power laptops and DVD players; however, there are many aircraft that have no power supplies excepting in Business or First class areas.

When informing the travel agents or the airline that you wish to use a CPAP, they will require the model type of the CPAP machine to refer to their technical Departments, this is due to a requirement of Air Safety Departments (CAA or FAA). The model number is normally located on a printed plate on the underside of the machine

Most of the reputable CPAP manufacturers i.e. Resmed, Resironics etc. have sought approval for their machines and this in my experience is not a problem.

Most CPAP machines made in the last few years have the ability to automatically detect the voltage of the electrical current (for example: 110VAC vs. 220VAC) and switch to the appropriate one. They are also capable and designed for adjusting output to the cabin pressure. If you are unsure, check with your sleep specialist or direct with the CPAP manufacturer. Their details are available on the Internet.

Wherever possible **do not leave informing the airline/travel agent until the last minute.** They usually require a few days notice, as it may mean reassignment of a seat to accommodate your request.

If you have the option choose a window seat as the cable, hose etc. will not interfere with your seat neighbour if they have to move to use the toilet.

Do not forget to take with you on the aircraft the adaptor (*fig1*), as they are in short supply on aircraft particularly in the Economy section. Also consider packing some foam earplug inserts *fig 2*, as these are helpful in reducing cabin noise. They can also be moulded to fit tightly in the ear.



Fig 2 Foam earplugs

You are not permitted to use the CPAP during take off or landing this is quite normal.

If it is your first time travelling and want to use the machine do not feel self-conscious. Airline staff are usually very helpful and familiar with patients with medical needs, however, be prepared for other passengers to stare. Take no notice of them, your good nights sleep is much more important. If you do feel self-conscious, place a blanket over your head (the cabin attendant will supply extra blankets), as this will reduce some of the staring. Take care not to cover mask “exhaust” to allow airflow out of mask and keep machine inlet free.

## **5) Security Screening**

### ***Give yourself extra time to get to the loading gate for security screening***

CPAPs are allowed through security checkpoints once they have undergone screening.

Passengers may be required to take their CPAP machine out of its carrying case and place the device in a bin for x-ray screening. Facemasks and tubing can remain in the carrying case.

In addition to x-ray inspection of your CPAP machine, a visual and physical inspection, and Explosive Swab Trace Detection (ETD) sampling will be required.

**To facilitate CPAP machine hygiene and cleanliness:** Once out of the carrying case, you can place your CPAP machine in a clear plastic bag before placing the device in the bin. You will need to provide/bring your own plastic bag.

## **6) Battery Packs (use when no power supply available.)**

There are specialist battery packs available, however, usually these are very expensive. Some rental services are available from patient support groups.

Note: - Special permission to carry batteries on-board aircraft will be required and guidance notes/advice on this subject will be published as a separate document.

## **7) Humidifiers**

Check with your sleep specialist if you can use the CPAP without the humidifier for 24 hrs, as airport security procedures usually do not permit you to take liquids (distilled water etc.) onto the plane.

If you do need to use a humidifier the cabin staff will give you mineral water to fill the humidifier on board. This should not harm the machine for such short periods of use. (Mineral water can cause lime scale build up with prolonged use.)

## **8) Cruise Ships**

Normally there is little problem using CPAP and Humidifiers aboard recognized cruise ships. Pack and carry the plug adaptor (fig1) as plug points vary on board. Inform your Cabin Steward that you intend using the CPAP device and if any problems occur the Ships Electrical Officer or Chief Engineer are highly knowledgeable and can quickly sort out any problems and assist as appropriate.

If you are going on an "adventure" small type cruise ship you may wish to seek advice in advance from the travel agent regarding the use of CPAP and electrical facilities aboard.

### 9) *Travel Checklist*

- 1) Inform travel agent/Airline in advance of your travel – model number and type
- 2) Pack in Hand-baggage
  - CPAP machine
  - Cable incl. extension
  - Mask
  - Plug adaptor
  - Earplugs
  - (Humidifier)
  - Clear plastic bag
- 3) Carry letter from your specialist or Consultant that you require CPAP.
- 4) Give yourself extra time to get to the boarding gate for security screening.