

Traveling with Heart Disease

If you are a patient with heart disease, you should still be able to travel;¹ however, there are some exceptions.

People with the following heart complications are advised not to travel:

- people with angina pectoris,
- people with heart failure or rhythm disturbances that cause symptoms at rest with minimal exertion,
- people who have had a heart attack within the past 14 days, and
- people who have had a heart attack causing shock or heart failure within the past eight weeks.²

Individuals should not fly if:

- they have had a heart attack (myocardial infarction) within the past two weeks;
- they have had coronary artery stent placement within the past two weeks;
- they have had coronary artery bypass surgery within the past three weeks (longer if they have had pulmonary complications); or
- they have unstable angina, poorly controlled heart failure, or uncontrolled arrhythmias.³

Planning ahead, knowing your limits, and knowing what to do if symptoms are present can allow for enjoyable travels with the least risk to your health...in fact appropriate actions can be lifesaving.¹

Before you travel:

- Talk to your doctor to see if any pre-travel testing may be warranted to assure that the cardiac disease is stable.
- Carry adequate supplies of prescribed medicine.
- Carry a copy of your medical history, including a recent electrocardiogram, EKG, and treadmill stress test, if available, as well as results of angiograms, stents, and by-pass surgery.¹



- Carry phone numbers for your doctor(s) and family members.
- During flight, consider wearing compression stockings, pass on the alcohol, and drink plenty of fluids to avoid blood clots.³
- If traveling by plane, request a special low-fat, low-sodium, low-cholesterol meal. Make this request at least two days before your flight.

During travel, know the symptoms to watch for, and seek medical help if you have any of the following:

- chest pain;
- irregular pulse or one unusually fast (greater than 100 beats per minute) or very slow (lower than 50 beats per minute);
- shortness of breath;
- light-headedness, dizziness;
- unusual fatigue;
- unusual swelling of the legs and/or feet;
- generalized feeling of illness;
- unusual fatigue; or
- sharp back pain in the mid to lower quadrant.¹

If you have any symptoms, don't wait – seek immediate medical attention. It is better to have a “false alarm” than to wait it out, which may result in more dire consequences. Talk with your doctor(s) before you travel so you can know how to handle any medical emergency in your mode of travel and/or at your destination should it arise.

Sources:

1. MedtoGo (2008). Traveling with heart disease [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://medtogo.com/traveling-with-heart-disease.html>.
2. Merck & Company (2003). Travel and health: Merck manual home edition [on-line]. Retrieved February 22, 2008. From <http://www.merck.com/mmhe/print/sec25/ch303/ch303a.html>.
3. Fogoros, R. (2007). Guidelines for flying with heart disease [on-line]. Retrieved February 21, 2008. From <http://heartdisease.about.com/od/otherriskfactors/a/flyinghd.htm>.