

Nice and easy does it when traveling by air

As people age, many elders feel uncertain about travel. Often anxious about dealing with the hustle and bustle associated with today's airports and airline travel, many decline attending family gatherings for the security of home.

Even for the most seasoned frequent flier, airline travel can be a daunting task.



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Long lines for check in, luggage handling, TSA screening and the boarding process can be all too much for the elderly.

Taking the "nice and easy" approach will help you through and allow you to enjoy the travel experience. Just like the captain, plan your flight. Some tips:

- Shop for your flight well in advance, taking into consideration flight schedule, stops and airports.
- Avoid changing planes if at all possible. Nonstop is best even if you need to drive a bit farther to an alternate airport. The nonstop flight will save you time and the hassle of changing planes. The next best option is a direct flight. Although the plane will stop to unload and take on some passengers, you remain seated and continue on. Also shopping in advance should save money as airfares tend to rise closer to the travel date.
- Schedule the travel for off-peak travel

times and days. Avoid the Monday morning business rush and pre-holiday travel. For example, flying on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving will beat the rush and give a day to rest before the big event. This will allow easier movement through the terminals and better seat availability. An added bonus is that airfares tend to be lower at off-peak times and days.

■ **Smaller airports tend to be less daunting.** Avoid the mega airports such as Atlanta; you simply do not want to navigate through the estimated 260,000 people who visit the Atlanta airport each day.

■ **Pack light.** Invest in new, lightweight suitcases with wheels and extended handles. You do not need the hassle of schlepping your belongings along the way — check your bags and avoid carry-on luggage. However, make sure to carry all essential medications with you. Or better yet, my friend Bill ships his clothes a week early via UPS with his family confirming arrival in advance. The shipping cost is less than the airline bag fees and Bill avoids the luggage hassle completely (smart guy).

■ **Arrive to the airport two hours early.** Add an extra hour to the airlines' suggested hour. This way you take your time, find a seat at your gate and relax enjoy some people watching while drinking a cup of coffee or tea.

■ **Consider using a wheel chair.** Airports provide this service for free (although a TIP is appreciated). The Sky Cap is experienced in moving about the airport terminal. It will save you from getting lost and help expedite you to the proper gate.



Don't be intimidated by security: Simply go with the flow and follow the TSA instructions. Most TSA inspectors try to be helpful and have gotten friendly over the past few years. I think they received some Dale Carnegie training. I have actually seen some smile on occasion! By the way, this is when checking or pre-shipping your luggage really helps.

A travel companion will surely help, whether it be a family member, friend or professional medical escort. It is always good to have a helping hand.

If one should find themselves in need of a professional medical escort, Air Trek is always more than happy to help. We have a Commercial Airline Medical Escort Service set in place to meet international and long-distance transportation needs for those who require or desire assistance onboard a commercial aircraft. Air Trek will take care of everything, including booking airline tickets, helping

with navigation through crowded airports (especially useful around the holidays), getting one to their desired destination and any additional needs that may arise.

Those with health concerns should check with their health-care provider before traveling. A simple prescription for supplemental oxygen or perhaps a Valium could make the flight more enjoyable.

Remember: Pre-planning and "nice and easy" does it. ■

— Dana Carr is an airline transport pilot and serves as director of operations for Air Trek Inc., which is family owned and operated since 1978, and specializes in helping people travel throughout the world. Air ambulance information is available at www.medjets.com. Aircraft charter and luxury travel info is available at www.airtrek.aero.

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