Headway
the brain injury association

Holidays and travel after brain injury

This publication has been written to help you with planning for holidays and travel after a brain injury, as well as listing other sources of support with travelling, such as where to get financial help and information to consider for travel insurance.

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Introduction

After a brain injury, planning a holiday might require even more care and you might need to look for locations that can accommodate your needs. Holiday organisers are increasingly considering the needs and wants of people with disabilities, broadening your options of possible holiday destinations.

This publication has been written to help you with planning for holidays and travel after a brain injury, as well as listing other sources of support with travelling, such as where to get financial help and information to consider for travel insurance.

The information in this publication does not replace clinical guidance from medical professionals. You should always get advice from your GP or other suitably qualified professional for help with managing the effects of brain injury.

Things to research before travelling

Whether you are planning on having a short weekend away or a long holiday abroad, there are a number of things you should research in advance to help with making sure your holiday runs as smoothly as possible.

- Check whether there are **any special health requirements** for the countries that you are visiting if you are travelling abroad. Vaccinations may be required or advisable against certain native diseases; you should speak to your neurologist or GP about any vaccinations you may require.

- Check in advance whether the places you are travelling to and from have **accessible facilities** such as toilets and if so, where they are located. Some cities within the UK have this information available on their websites. Changing Places has a map of accessible toilets across the UK, available at www.changing-places.org/find. You may need to have a Radar key to unlock some of these toilets. Most local authorities sell Radar keys or you can buy them online.

- If you take medication, check whether there are any **restrictions on bringing your medication** into the country to which you are travelling.

- If you are not sure whether it is safe for you to fly because of your brain injury, **check with your GP or neurologist**. Headway cannot advise on the safety of flying after brain injury as there is no set rule on this and will depend on personal circumstances.

- Check in advance that your **insurance policy** will cover your brain injury, as well as any aids or equipment that you may need to take with you. Standard travel insurance often will

not cover brain injury, however there are specialist insurance companies that do. You can find a list of relevant insurance companies further on in this publication.

- If you frequently go on holiday by plane, find out whether you can obtain a **Frequent Traveller's Medical Card** (sometimes called a Fremec card) as this will give the airline a record of your needs so that you do not have to inform them of these each time you travel.

- **Contact your holiday accommodation in advance** to discuss any needs you may have such as accessibility or dietary requirements. You could even ask about noise levels or how busy the accommodation gets if, for instance, you have sensitivity to noise or stimulus.

- If you are planning on driving in another country, check for any **changes in driving conditions** and whether you need an international driving permit. You can find more information about this on the UK government's website at www.gov.uk/driving-abroad/international-driving-permit.

  Remember that a brain injury can affect driving skills, and you should always inform your licensing authority of a brain injury after it has occurred (for more information on this see our publication *Driving after brain injury*).

Planning your holiday

- Consider keeping a folder with holiday documents in so that you can keep a record of important paperwork and track the progress of your travel arrangements.

- Consider using a holiday planning app to help you with making arrangements.

- If you have fatigue, try to space activities out and leave time in between to rest. You could also keep days before and after travelling free so that you can rest.

- Write down important dates on a calendar if you have memory problems.

- There are many travel comparison websites that can help visitors with browsing through accessible holiday packages. The Useful Organisations section lists some of these that may be helpful.

- The UK government's Foreign Travel Advice website allows you to look up general information about some countries which can help you to make a decision about your travel destination. Visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice.

Giving advance notice to travel services

- If you will need help to board your mode of transport (i.e. coach, train, plane or ship), inform the relevant company in advance. Most companies require notice of at least 48 hours before departure.

- If you are travelling on a ship with a carer, let the shipping company know in advance as your carer might be able to travel for free.

- If you use a wheelchair, find out from your travel provider or transport company whether arrangements will need to be made to travel with it, as you may be required to put your

wheelchair in storage during transport and have alternative arrangements made to assist you with getting on/off the vehicle.

- Ask your travel provider or transport company whether you will need extra time with boarding, and if so make sure you arrive with plenty of extra time to board.

- Consider applying for one of Headway's Brain Injury Identity Cards to help with getting support in public places such as airports or shops. More information about our ID card is available at www.headway.org.uk/idcard.

Packing for your holiday

- Ensure that you have a good supply of any required medication, aids and equipment to last you for your stay. If possible and permitted by your GP, take extras with you in case you are delayed from returning but make sure that this complies with any restrictions on medication types/amounts in the country you are visiting.

- Label medications clearly, or where possible, keep them in their original packaging.

- Remember to take your Headway Brain Injury Identity Card with you. The ID card can help to ensure that you receive an appropriate response and support if you need help with explaining the effects of your brain injury. You can find out more about the ID card at www.headway.org.uk/idcard or by contacting Headway on 0115 924 0800.

- If you do not have a Headway ID card, the UK government suggests taking along a 'travelling letter' outlining the most

common effects of your brain injury.

- Don't forget to pack a camera (or your mobile phone charger if you have a camera phone) so that you can take photos of your holiday! This might be particularly important if you have memory problems and may forget your precious holiday memories.

- Keep a notebook or page in a safe place containing emergency contact details and any other important details such as your travel insurance providers' emergency number and your policy number.

Other considerations for travelling after brain injury

- If you find it difficult to cope in busy, noisy or crowded environments, contact any attractions you are planning on visiting to find out when they are most quiet.

- Be aware that it is generally advisable to avoid drinking alcohol after brain injury due to reduced tolerance. There are plenty of non-alcoholic beverages now available, including 'mocktails' that you could try. More information on this is available in our publication *Alcohol after brain injury*.

- Be aware that travelling can sometimes be a stressful process and there may occasionally be delays. If you have problems with managing anger and feel you may have an anger episode while travelling, see our publication *Anger after brain injury* in advance for useful tips on coping with anger issues and keep your Headway Brain Injury Identity Card at hand.

Financial support for travelling after brain injury

There are a number of schemes that offer discounts on travel within the UK. For instance, a Disabled Person's Railcard gives up to a third off rail tickets; more information on this is available on www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk.

You may be able to get a bus pass offering free bus travel, this would be issued by your local council.

Depending on your circumstances, some organisations may offer financial assistance to help towards holiday costs. The *Useful Organisations* section of this publication lists some organisations that can assist with this.

You may be able to get a bus pass offering free bus travel, this would be issued by your local council.

Depending on your circumstances, some organisations may offer financial assistance to help towards holiday costs. The *Useful Organisations* section of this publication lists some organisations that can assist with this.

Under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Act 1970, anyone with a disability or family with a disabled member has the right to approach their local social services department concerning assistance in making holiday arrangements. Unfortunately, in practice, holidays are often a low priority for social services due to budget restrictions - but it is always worth asking.

Travel insurance

The companies listed in this section all provide insurance cover for travellers with a disability. Headway does not endorse any of the following companies. Their details are provided for

information purposes only. It is always important to shop around to get the best possible cover for your situation and be sure that any policy you do take out meets your needs.

Remember, if you do not declare everything about your medical history, the company may refuse to pay out even if you make a claim.

- Policy Direct
  www.policydirect.co.uk/travel-insurance.html

- All Clear Travel Insurance
  www.allcleartravel.co.uk

- Direct Travel Insurance
  www.direct-travel.co.uk

- Free Spirit Travel Insurance
  www.freespirittravelinsurance.com

- JD Travel
  www.jdtravelinsurance.co.uk

Useful organisations

The organisations listed in this section are provided for information purposes only. Their inclusion does not imply endorsement, recommendation, or approval by Headway. Users should make their own assessment of any organisation or service before engaging with them.

- **The 3H Foundation**
  Helps with arranging holidays and provides grants
  www.the3hfoundation.org.uk

- **Access at Last**
  Offers wheelchair accessible holidays
  www.accessatlast.com

- **Calvert Lakes**
  Offers a number of accessible activities through a network of centres
  www.calvertlakes.org.uk

- **Disabled Access Holidays.com**
  Offers assistance with transport, accommodation and booking holidays for people with a disability
  www.disabledaccessholidays.com/default.asp

- **Jumbulance**
  Assists with arranging accessible travel for holidays, short trips and day trips within the UK and Europe
  www.jumbulance.org.uk

- **Revitalise**
  Provides breaks and holidays for people with disabilities
  www.revitalise.org.uk

- **Tourism For All**
  Offers directories of accommodation, things to do and food and drink to help with planning an accessible holiday
  www.tourismforall.co.uk

- **Turn2Us**
  Offers a grant search tool to help with finding grants to provide financial assistance with arranging holidays
  https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk/

- **Motability - Rough Guide to Accessible Britain**
  A guide offering information about accessible holiday destinations across Britain
  https://news.motability.co.uk/accessible_guide/

We hope that this has been a helpful resource. Please consider sharing your feedback with us by scanning the QR code or by visiting our publication feedback survey https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/hwpublications.

Learn more and support our work at www.headway.org.uk/get-involved.

This information was last reviewed in 2022.

We're here to listen.

If you need support, or have a question about brain injury, contact our free nurse-led helpline:

0808 800 2244
helpline@headway.org.uk

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