

# ACCESSIBLE AIR TRAVEL

## WORKBOOK FOR SENIORS WITH LIMITED MOBILITY

---

*Your step-by-step companion for planning, navigating,  
and advocating for a safe, dignified trip by air*

*Prepared for:*

*Travel dates:*

*Destination:*

*Based on your rights under the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA)*

[www.SeniorSafetyAdvice.com](http://www.SeniorSafetyAdvice.com)

## How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is your personal travel planning companion. It walks you through every stage of accessible air travel, from booking your flight to filing a complaint if something goes wrong.

Each section includes:

- ✓ A checklist of action steps to complete
- ✓ OT Tips from an occupational therapist's perspective
- ✓ Reflection prompts to personalize your plan
- ✓ Notes space to capture what you learn or need to remember

Print this workbook before your trip. Bring it with you to the airport. You have rights, this workbook helps you use them.

**OT Tip:** I spent over 12 years as an occupational therapist helping seniors stay independent and safe. The tips in this workbook come directly from that clinical experience, adapted for air travel.

## Section 1: Before Your Flight

Complete these steps at least 2 weeks before departure — ideally as soon as you book.

### Step 1A: Research and Notify

- Research your airline's accessibility and disability policies  
*Check their website under 'SpecialAssistance' or call customer service directly.*
- Notify the airline of your disability and all specific needs  
*Be specific: boarding assistance, wheelchair, seating preferences, oxygen, etc.*
- Get a confirmation number or written record of your requests
- Reconfirm all requests at least 48 hours before departure

**OT Tip:** Airlines are required by the ACAA to accommodate your needs, but they work best when given advance notice. Don't assume they will 'figure it out' at the airport.

#### Reflect & Personalize:

**What specific help will I need on this trip? (List every need, boarding, seating, oxygen, service animal, etc.)**

---

---

---

### Step 1B: Prepare Your Mobility Equipment

- Remove all loose or detachable parts from your wheelchair or scooter
- Label your mobility device clearly with your name, phone number, and address
- Write out assembly and disassembly instructions  
*Tape a copy to the chair itself in a plastic sleeve.*
- Photograph your device before the flight  
*Document any existing scratches or damage for reference.*
- Confirm battery type with the airline (lithium batteries have special rules)
- Ask whether your device will be stored in the cargo hold or cabin
-

**OT Tip:** Power wheelchair batteries can be a sticking point with airlines. Check the watt-hour rating on your battery and confirm compliance with your specific airline at least a week before travel.

**Reflect & Personalize:**

***What is my plan if my mobility equipment is damaged or lost in transit?***

---

---

---

## Step 1C: Medications and Medical Equipment

- Pack all medications in your carry-on bag, not checked luggage
- Carry a complete list of your medications with dosages
- Bring documentation for medical equipment (CPAP, oxygen concentrator, etc.)
- Confirm with the airline whether your medical device is allowed on board
- Pack extra supplies (at least 3 extra days' worth) in case of delays
- Keep medications in original labeled containers

**OT Tip:** As an OT, I always advise packing medications as if your checked bags will be lost, because sometimes they are. Your health cannot be checked.

## Step 1D: TSA Cares

- Call TSA Cares at least 72 hours before your flight  
*Phone: 1-855-787-2227. Available Mon-Fri 8am-11pm ET; weekends 9am-8pm ET.*
- Request a Passenger Support Specialist to meet you at the checkpoint
- Obtain a TSA Notification Card to share at the checkpoint  
*Available at [TSA.gov](https://www.tsa.gov) or through [TSACares](https://www.tsacares.com).*

**OT Tip:** TSA Cares is a free service most travelers don't know about. A Passenger Support Specialist can walk you through security screening at your pace, explain each step, and help you avoid unnecessary delays or distress.

**Reflect & Personalize:**

***Do I have a medical device or condition I need to disclose to TSA? Write it out so you're prepared to explain it calmly.***

---

---

---

## Section 2: At the Airport

*Plan to arrive early, at least 2.5 to 3 hours before departure for domestic flights, 3.5+ for international.*

### Step 2A: Check-In

- Confirm all disability assistance requests at check-in
- Tag your mobility device for planeside return (if applicable)  
*This means your chair comes back to you at the gate, not baggage claim.*
- Ask for a gate agent escort if you need help navigating to your gate
- Get the name of the airline representative who assists you

### Step 2B: Airport Navigation

- Request airport wheelchair or electric cart if needed between terminals
- Identify accessible restrooms along your route
- Locate your gate and confirm boarding time
- Identify the pre-boarding announcement and be ready to board first
- Ask for help with connections if your layover is short or the airport is large

**OT Tip:** Many large airports have accessibility maps on their websites. Download yours before you travel. Knowing where accessible restrooms and elevators are in advance reduces travel stress significantly.

#### Reflect & Personalize:

***What are my biggest concerns about navigating this specific airport? Write them down and plan ahead.***

---

---

---

## Step 2C: TSA Security Screening

- Present TSA Notification Card or verbally inform the TSA officer of your condition
- Request a private screening room if needed
- TSA officers must pat-down only (no removal of medical devices without your agreement)
- Ask for an officer of your gender for a pat-down if preferred
- Do not remove braces, prosthetics, or orthotic devices unless you choose to

**OT Tip:** You have the right to a private screening. You have the right to keep your assistive devices on your body. If a TSA officer insists otherwise, calmly ask to speak with a supervisor and invoke your rights.

## Step 2D: After Landing — Equipment Inspection

- Retrieve your mobility device at planeside (confirm this at check-in)
- Inspect your wheelchair or scooter immediately upon return  
*Check for scratches, bent parts, electrical issues, and missing components.*
- Report any damage to airline staff before leaving the gate area
- Take photos of any damage immediately
- Get a written damage report from the airline
- Keep your photos and the report for any claims

**OT Tip:** Airlines are liable for damage to your mobility equipment caused by their handling. Reporting it immediately (before leaving the airport) protects your claim. Once you leave, it becomes much harder to prove.

## Section 3: During Your Flight

*You have rights on board, too. Know what to ask for before you board.*

### Step 3A: Seating and Boarding

- Request pre-boarding when your boarding group is called
- Confirm seating accommodations with the gate agent before boarding  
*Movable armrests, bulkhead seating, companion seating, extra legroom.*
- Ask for a special safety briefing (you are entitled to one)
- Confirm where your carry-on medical equipment will be stored

**OT Tip:** Movable aisle armrests are required on certain aircraft under the ACAA. Airlines must tell you which seats have them if you ask. Request this information when you book your ticket, not at the gate.

#### Reflect & Personalize:

***What seating setup would make me most comfortable and safe during the flight?***

---

---

---

### Step 3B: In-Flight Assistance

- Know that crew can assist with moving to and from your seat
- Request the on-board aisle wheelchair if you need to access the lavatory  
*Airlines with more than 60 seats and accessible lavatories must provide one.*
- Ask crew for help storing or retrieving carry-on items
- Ask crew for help deplaning at your destination
- Inform the crew of any medical condition they should know about

**OT Tip:** Flight attendants are trained to assist passengers with disabilities. Don't wait until a problem develops, introduce yourself at the start of the flight and let them know what you may need.

### Step 3C: Service Animals

---

- Confirm service animal acceptance policy with your specific airline before booking
  - Bring documentation if required (varies by airline)
  - Identify the animal clearly with a vest or harness
  - Plan for your animal's needs during long flights (elimination, water)
-

## Section 4: After Your Flight — If Something Goes Wrong

*You have the right to expect dignified, accessible air travel. If that standard is not met, here is what to do.*

### Step 4A: Talk to the CRO

- Ask for the airline's Complaint Resolution Official (CRO) immediately  
*Airlines are required to have a CRO available at all times during operating hours, in person or by phone.*
- Explain the problem clearly and calmly
- Get the CRO's name and employee ID
- Ask for written confirmation of any resolution offered
- 

**OT Tip:** A CRO is not just customer service, this is a designated role specifically for disability-related complaints under the ACAA. If the first person you speak to cannot resolve your issue, ask specifically for the CRO.

#### Reflect & Personalize:

***What will I do if I feel my rights are being ignored in the moment? Write out your plan, it is easier to advocate for yourself when you have rehearsed it.***

---

---

---

### Step 4B: File a Formal DOT Complaint

- File a complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation if not satisfied  
*Online: [airconsumer.dot.gov](https://airconsumer.dot.gov) / Phone: 1-202-366-2220*
- File within 6 months of the incident for best results
- Include: flight number, date, airline, names of staff involved, what happened, and what was requested
- Attach photos, written documentation, or your damage report
- Keep a copy of everything you submit
- 

**OT Tip:** The DOT tracks complaints and uses them to enforce airline compliance with the ACAA. Even if your individual complaint does not resolve immediately, filing it helps protect future travelers.

## Section 5: Know Your Rights Under the ACAA

The Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) is a federal law that prohibits airlines from discriminating against passengers with physical or mental disabilities. Here is a plain-language summary of what you are entitled to.

| Your Right                                    | What It Means                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dignity and Respect                           | You cannot be discriminated against or treated differently because of your disability. |
| Accessible Airport Facilities                 | Airlines must ensure that the portions of airports they control are accessible.        |
| Boarding, Deplaning, and In-Flight Assistance | You are entitled to help at each stage of your journey.                                |
| Mobility Devices and Service Animals          | Your assistive equipment and service animal must be accommodated.                      |
| Seating Accommodations                        | You can request specific seating that meets your physical needs.                       |
| Accessible Aircraft Features                  | Movable armrests and accessible lavatories (where available) must be provided.         |
| Immediate CRO Access                          | You have the right to speak with a Complaint Resolution Official at any time.          |

**OT Tip:** You don't have to memorize the law, you just need to know it exists and that you can invoke it. Printing this workbook and bringing it to the airport gives you that confidence in hand.

**Reflect& Personalize:**  
*Have I experienced discrimination or poor service on a past flight? What would I do differently with this knowledge?*

# Quick-Reference Master Checklist

*Use this summary sheet as a fast review before each phase of your trip.*

## Before Your Flight

- Researched airline accessibility policies
- Notified airline of all needs
- Reconfirmed requests 48 hours out
- Mobility device prepared and labeled
- Medications packed in carry-on
- Contacted TSA Cares

## At the Airport

- Confirmed requests at check-in
- Tagged mobility device for planeside return
- Navigated airport with assistance if needed
- Completed TSA screening
- Pre-boarded
- Inspected equipment after landing

## During the Flight

- Confirmed seating accommodations
- Received special safety briefing (if needed)
- Requested in-flight assistance as needed

## After Your Flight / If Problems Arise

- Spoke with CRO if needed
- Filed DOT complaint if needed
- Documented all incidents with photos and written reports

## A Note From Your Author

I created this workbook because I know what it is like to navigate complex systems when your body doesn't cooperate the way it used to. As a retired occupational therapist with a CAPS (Certified Aging in Place Specialist) credential and years of experience working with seniors managing mobility challenges, I have seen firsthand how the right information — given at the right time — changes everything.

Accessible air travel is possible. It takes preparation, self-advocacy, and knowing that the law is on your side. That's what this workbook gives you.

Take this workbook with you. Write in it. Use it. You've earned the right to travel well.

*Safe travels,*

**Esther Kane, OT, CAPS, C.D.S.**

[SeniorSafetyAdvice.com](https://SeniorSafetyAdvice.com)

• [AgingInPlaceDirectory.com](https://AgingInPlaceDirectory.com) — Find local aging-in-place professionals

• TSA

© SeniorSafetyAdvice.com. For personal use only. Not for redistribution without permission.