

You Can Fly!

Navigating Air Travel with a Stoma and any other disability

IFRAH MOHAMED AND LIBBY HERBERT



Summer lies ahead, and with it the promise of foreign holidays. Yet for some, air travel with a stoma can feel daunting. But we have you covered. Here, Colostomy UK's CEO, Libby Herbert worked with ostomate Ifrah Mohamed to develop top tips for taking to the skies with a stoma

Flying is important to me because it's a chance to escape reality... be who you want to be, where you want to be.

Ifrah

Ifrah has been living with a stoma and a medical implant since the age of 20. At first, even simple outings felt overwhelming let alone flying. But by connecting with others in the stoma community and leaning on resources from Colostomy UK, she rediscovered the freedom of travel.

Now, Ifrah shares her experiences to help others do the same with confidence, dignity, and preparation. She has joined me at many an event with aviation organisations and starred in an awareness video (you can find this on our website under Information)

Planning is Key

Ifrah's golden rule - plan early. That starts with contacting your airline when booking your flight. Let them know about your condition and any adjustments you might need, such as proximity to a toilet, and additional baggage or assistance.

Most airlines are accommodating when you inform them in advance. As Ifrah recalls:

"The response was so reassuring. There weren't any extra questions. They just said: 'Of course, that's fine!'"

Planning Support for Air Travel: What You Need to Know

Airports and airlines are committed to helping you travel with dignity, ease, and confidence. If you live with a visible or non-visible disability, or have a medical condition that affects your mobility, stamina, or confidence, you're entitled to ask for support at every stage of your journey.

You may wish to consider booking assistance if you:

- » Are travelling with mobility aids, medical equipment, or an assistance dog
- » Would find boarding easier with support

- » Experience fatigue, pain, or difficulty standing or walking for long periods
- » May feel anxious or overwhelmed navigating through a busy airport
- » Need extra help checking in, moving through security, or collecting luggage

If your condition varies day to day, or you're unsure how you'll feel when travelling, we encourage you to book support based on your worst day, not your best. That way, you'll be better prepared, especially if there are delays, long queues, or unexpected health changes.

At many UK airports, you're free to travel independently if you choose, and still access assistance if and when you need it. The goal of these airports is to help you travel on your own terms, with as little or as much help as suits you.



To make sure the right arrangements are in place, we recommend booking assistance at least **48 hours before your flight**. While last-minute requests are possible, they may involve longer wait times or limited availability.



Please note that if you're travelling with certain medical items (like electric wheelchairs, equipment, or assistance dogs), your airline will need advance notice to safely prepare for your journey. Without this, boarding may be delayed or in some cases denied.

If in doubt, ask. Assistance exists to make flying possible for everyone.

Know Your Airport

Visit the airport's website ahead of time:

- » If you need to find the location of accessible toilets (some airports also have stoma friendly toilets)
- » If you have booked assistance
Locate the assistance desk and accessible security lanes (not all airports are able to have these)
- » Check their policy on disabilities and what support is available for you

Many UK airports and airlines now recognise the **Sunflower Lanyard** as a symbol of a non-visible disability. You can request one before you travel or pick it up at the assistance desk.



Medical Documentation

We recommend you travel with:

- » A **Colostomy UK travel certificate** or a **Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Medical Device Awareness Card**
- » A **copy of your prescriptions**, or have access to your **medication list via the NHS app** when travelling through airport security especially if you're carrying:
 - **Prescription medication** (particularly controlled substances)
 - **Medical supplies** (such as stoma bags, catheters, or syringes)
 - **Assistive devices** or liquids exceeding the standard 100ml rule (this might change, but hasn't yet)

Why This is Helpful:

- » **Reduces delays at security:**
A clear prescription helps explain the presence of medication or devices in your hand luggage.
- » **Supports your rights:**
If questioned, you can show proof that items are medically necessary.
- » **Backs up your Travel Certificate or Medical Device Awareness Card:**
These are helpful, but a prescription adds official detail.

These documents should help smooth the security process and reduce anxiety.



"I told security I had a stoma bag and a catheter. I had my doctor's letter, and they were absolutely fine," says Ifrah.

What to Expect with New Airport Security Scanners

Airports across the UK have now introduced next-generation security scanners designed to speed up the process and improve safety for all passengers. These advanced scanners create a detailed image using safe, millimetre-wave technology not X-rays and help staff detect prohibited items without the need for physical contact.

For many passengers with medical devices, stoma bags, or disabilities, it's natural to feel anxious about this part of the journey.

If you're nervous about public searches or scans, you have the right to request a private search in a private room, and you can ask for a chaperone.

Here's what you need to know about new-generation scanners:

How They Work

- » The scanner produces a generic, anonymous outline of a human body. It doesn't display intimate images or details and protects your privacy.
- » The system highlights areas where additional checks might be

needed for example, where a medical device or stoma bag sits.

If You Have a Medical Device or Stoma

- » You do not need to remove your bag or medical equipment.
- » You may carry a doctor's letter or a Colostomy UK Travel Certificate, which you can discreetly hand to security staff if you'd prefer not to explain in public.
- » If the scanner indicates something, you might be asked for a quick check. You can always request that this is done in private with a same-gender officer.

Your Right to Ask

- » As above, you can politely request a private search at any point.
- » Security teams are trained to treat passengers with dignity, but don't hesitate to speak up if you need privacy or additional time.



Helpful Tips

- » Let security staff know about your stoma, implant, or device before entering the scanner, if this will give you peace of mind.
- » If they want to search your hand luggage, you can request that they put on clean gloves to do this.
- » Keep all medical items in your hand luggage with documentation handy.
- » Arrive early to give yourself extra time to move through security without feeling rushed.

In your hand luggage, be sure to carry:

- » Enough stoma management supplies and medications for the journey and emergencies (hopefully there won't be any delays, but best to be prepared)
- » Prescription medication (in original packaging, with a doctor's note)
- » Extra clothes and wipes, just in case
- » Any documentation mentioned above

You're entitled to:

- » Additional hand luggage for medical equipment
- » Extra checked baggage allowance, if required for medical reasons just notify the airline in advance



On Board Confidence

Ifrah had concerns about how her stoma bag would respond to cabin pressure:

"But actually, all bags have a filter. My fears were in my head. Nobody knew anything. I realised it wasn't an issue at all."

Ask to board early if that would make you more comfortable. Let cabin crew know if you need discreet support they're there to help.

Final Advice

"Honestly, I would say do it. Take the plunge."

Speak with your GP or stoma care nurse well in advance to ensure you're medically ready. Reach out to Colostomy UK or other support groups for guidance.

Final thoughts from Ifrah and Libby Herbert

Flying is freedom. And with the right tools and support, **you can fly** with comfort and confidence. You're not alone and you hopefully never



have to leave your dignity at the departure gate.

And when it comes to air travel with any disability or stoma: **you absolutely can fly.**

If you would like any further information or talk to one of our volunteers who has a stoma and is a regular flyer please e-mail us hello@colostomyuk.org or call 0800 328 4257

For a copy of our travel certificate and travel advice booklet please go to our website www.colostomyuk.org/information/travel-advice Or e-mail us at hello@colostomyuk.org and we can e-mail or send you copies.