

To whom it may concern,

I'd like to share a few thoughts about transportation and disabilities. While I wouldn't normally consider myself disabled... Travelling always reminds me of my brokenness. I deal with chronic back and knee pain, and multiple severe allergies. At home, these are pretty easily managed- but long trips sitting, pulling bags, getting less sleep, and trying to manage my own food can combine to make travel almost impossible.

When it comes to my chronic knee pain and back pain, I find that most things work pretty smoothly on airlines/trains as long as I remember to call ahead and bring a doctor's note. I have had significant problems with getting help to lift my carry-on luggages, however! I have never figured out how to get properly get help on VIA trains, and wait until I can find a staff member or fellow passenger to plead for help. On airlines, I have been told to ask for wheelchair service! I can walk and do stairs, I just can't carry my bags up the stairs... But it seems no one has thought of finding a way to provide that help unless the client has mobility issues.

Some flight attendants have suggested I should simply bring less... However to manage my chronic pain I require ice packs, heat packs, and of course medications. With my severe allergies I must carry food for the trip, and occasionally (because of a sensitivity to sulphites, which can be in some bottled water) even the water I will drink! I must also plan for the contingency of pain forcing me to lie down in the airport (so a small mat & pillow)... And of course everyone likes at least a change of clothing & toothbrush in case the main luggage is delayed.

I don't mind asking for wheelchair assistance if that is what is required to actually get the help I need... But I've always been puzzled as to why other options of assistance are available but not "I just need help lifting a normally weighted piece of carry-on".

I'm happy to say that within Canada, I've never had trouble with asking for assistance... But it's usually only after long flights that I really rely on help, so that's usually outside of Canada. I would like you to consider annual training for all transportation personnel that includes awareness of how to deal with chronic pain. I say this after a nightmarish trip that involved three trips through Frankfurt. The first, I had not known how to ask for assistance, and the ground crew grumped at me for being unable to lift my own bags, and made me wait (crying a little from pain and embarrassment) until all the other passengers had boarded before giving me assistance. The second, I asked for wheelchair assistance and it worked perfectly. The third... I had wheelchair assistance to my gate, but because of the layover and lack of stairs they asked if I could manage. I thought I could, but grossly miscalculated the length of layover. After 5 hours of sitting, I realized that my back was spasming and I actually would need help- and had to wait (standing) in line for almost half an hour before I spoke to ground crew. They were not at all pleasant (and I was already in significant pain), but eventually agreed to call the assistance folks

to come back, and asked me to go sit and wait. After sitting down, my pain levels got so severe I started sobbing uncontrollably... I realized then that I needed to take my medication, but didn't have water and could no longer manage walking. Instead of asking if I needed further help, or pulling me to wait somewhere in private, or boarding me first... Ground crew told other concerned passengers that "I had been helped". Eventually a kind passenger actually noticed that I was trying to communicate my need for water, and another passenger got me some. I was boarded last (so hundreds of people filed past me while I sobbed), and the person with the wheelchair admonished me to stop crying because they may not let me on the plane if I was so upset.

Please, please, please let that never happen in Canada. Teach our transportation crews to have compassion for human life and to actually stop and listen to why a client is upset.

When it comes to my severe allergies, there are a few things that concern me while travelling.

1) Being allowed to bring my own food is crucial, and being able to somehow manage preparation is always helpful. I usually rely heavily on the availability of hot water, because my allergies limit me significantly and I can't just bring a sandwich...

That said when I had less severe allergies it was always frustrating when airlines had food that I could \*possibly\* eat but no ingredient lists. I believe part of the CFIA labelling guidelines require that all foods not prepared on the premises be labelled, and yet I think airlines sometimes get around that because they are re-heating the entrees? I suggest it would be reasonable for airlines to at least have one binder of all the ingredients in every meal listed. They should be strongly encouraged to avoid generic terms such as "spices" and "natural flavours", as that does not at all help the allergic community! Or, they could actually have that information available online, so that allergic clients might consider their options before they board!

2) I always bring wipes with me to wipe down the seat/tray before I eat, but I have to ask about crews after they eat. At home, my family washes their hands after they eat my allergens. Do the transportation crew members? For severe allergies, prevention is often a matter of putting safer food protocols in place... And I'd like to think that it would be safer for more than just me if crews washed their hands after touching food.

3) Some airlines have a "buffer zone" for people with severe allergies. Others refuse to even let passengers around an allergic client know of the existence of the allergy!! I am lucky enough not to have reacted to my allergens being in the same room, but at 30,000 feet I don't really want to be taking even a small chance of cross-contamination. At the moment, I'm newly allergic to black pepper (among other things), and frankly it would be very easy in a tight travel space for that to be accidentally spilled onto my food, or even to accidentally be inhaled. I have only done a road trip thus far with this newest set of severe allergies, and one reason I chose to drive was because I was concerned about the lack of awareness there would be among strangers. And because I did not feel comfortable cooking safely at my destination... I had to bring my food for the week (an extra bag, which would have been unmanageable if I had flown or taken the train or bus).

Awareness is what I seek: at least force transportation companies to ASK other passengers to be considerate of the allergic person beside them! I understand that you can't force them to do anything... But at least in the asking there is a lessened risk for the person with the allergy.

4) First aid: Are all ground crew, air crew, etc, trained in anaphylaxis protocols? Do they all have EpiPens available? If not they should be, as things can progress very quickly. EpiPens should be available on board, because the majority of anaphylaxis related deaths occur in adults who are having their very first serious allergic reaction. In other words... The most serious allergic reaction that crews could encounter will be in clients that have no idea their body is about to react to the allergen.

Also, they should be aware of the mental health related aspects of allergies... I know that when I have a serious reaction, I am often unable to think clearly or make rational decisions. So I would hope that crews are adequately trained, on at least a yearly basis- because I cannot rely on my own training to be effective in an emergency!

Thank you very much for considering how to make travelling easier for myself and others like me. I know implementing such changes may take time, but if you are making a list of people to contact when changes occur... Please keep me on it. It would make a great deal of difference to me to be able to travel more easily!

Thank you,

Janice Henderson