

Travel Tips with a Urostomy

[00:00:00] I just got back from flying to Houston and spent a week in Galveston, Texas with my best friend. And I have to tell you, it was amazing. We ate fresh seafood, laughed way too much, had an 80-minute hot stone massage, and spent time at the beach and at the hotel just enjoying life, real life. Not hospital life, not recovery-focused life, just life.

[00:00:27] And while I was there, I kept thinking, "This is exactly the kind of thing people wonder about after surgery. Can I travel? Can I fly? And what does that even look like now?" So, this is what we're going to talk about today.

[00:00:42] But before we get into it, a quick note. I just want to share that I am not a medical professional. I'm sharing what I've learned through my own lived experience, so please always check with your healthcare team for anything specific to your situation.

[00:00:57] Okay, now let's get into it. [00:01:00] A lot of times we find ourselves asking, "Can I travel? Can I fly?" And the short answer is yes, you can travel with a urostomy. But like everything else in this journey, there are a few things that make it flow a little bit smoother once you know them.

[00:01:19] When you're booking your flight, let the airline know that you have a urostomy, it is considered a medical condition, and in some cases, they can help with things like early boarding, first on, first off, or seating assistance. And just having that little extra time and space to get on and off the plane takes a lot of stress out of the process.

[00:01:46] I also learned before going on this trip that a medical bag typically does not count as a carry-on.

[00:01:52] But always make sure you double-check with your specific airline so there are no surprises. I know that this applies to [00:02:00] Southwest. I was able to take on both a carry-on, my medical bag, and my carry-on suitcase, which I actually ended up checking at the gate because the flight was really full, and there was no fee for it. So I'm grateful for that.

[00:02:19] And then comes TSA. This is the part that people are usually nervous about, and I get it. I was scared to go through TSA, but I did have a friend who told me beforehand that it was not a big deal, that they hear people have a urostomy or an ostomy all the time. I know you're not exactly excited to

explain your internal plumbing situation to a stranger at security, but in reality, it is really very straightforward.

[00:02:48] First, they will ask you to rub the area where your pouch is located with your hand on the outside of your clothing, and then they will test your hand for explosives residue. It is not personal, it's just [00:03:00] procedure.

[00:03:02] After that, they will do a pat-down around the area where your pouch is, and the pat-down is a little awkward, yes, but it's done quickly and professionally, and then you're on your way, and there's nothing traumatic. If you're wearing a leg bag, they do, um, typically do a front and back pat-down and in between your legs, so just be prepared for that.

[00:03:26] You might want to put the leg bag on after you get through TSA. It won't be quite as awkward going through, I learned.

[00:03:35] And while we're on the subject of leg bags, something I learned the slightly hard way is that cabin pressure can affect drainage from your pouch into the leg bag.

[00:03:47] On my flight going there, everything went fine because I did not empty it right before I got on the plane. I had emptied it about probably, 10 minutes before then, and so the urine was [00:04:00] being siphoned from my pouch into the leg bag. But on the way back, I had emptied my pouch right before boarding, and I ended up needing to get up mid-flight to get things moving again because it wasn't siphoning properly. And it was really awkward because I could feel my pouch filling and it not flowing into the leg bag.

[00:04:25] Maybe empty it 10 to 15 minutes before you are ready to board the plane. That way it has time to siphon properly it makes things a little easier once you're in the air.

[00:04:39] Okay. Comfort is huge. So be sure to wear comfortable clothes. Bring an extra sweater or a shirt that you don't want to wear on the plane so you can place it in between your seatbelt and your pouch.

[00:04:54] It makes it a lot more comfortable, um, if you're not getting your pouch squished by the seatbelt, because [00:05:00] it goes right across it. And make sure your pouch is situated where you want it before you sit down, so you are comfortable, because it's a bit awkward trying to maneuver your pouch while sitting in a very small space with no privacy.

[00:05:18] It does make a big difference on how relaxed you will feel during the flight, because it was very awkward at first. I ended up getting up and going and emptying it and getting it situated before I sat back down.

[00:05:34] One thing about the carry-ons I should have mentioned a little bit earlier is if they make you check your carry-on like I had to do, make sure it's your carry-on suitcase, not your medical supplies. Make sure your medical supplies stay with you. That is a non-negotiable, and they cannot make you check your medical bag. That needs to stay with you just in case.

[00:05:59] One of the [00:06:00] highlights of my trip was getting an 80-minute hot stone massage. My bestie bought me that for my birthday. And yes, I told my therapist about my urostomy because it's not like she wasn't going to see it anyway. But as nervous as I was going into the massage, the therapist was awesome. She had worked around urostomies before, and I have to tell you, that massage was absolute heaven.

[00:06:28] You know, some people already understand it and some don't, but I found that there's no reason to feel embarrassed. Most of the time people are just curious and want to make sure you're comfortable.

[00:06:39] And after my trip, I realized something. When I was there enjoying life, I barely thought about having that pouch on my side.

[00:06:50] It was like I was normal. I wasn't worrying. I was just enjoying. And what was the most enjoyable was being able to sit [00:07:00] and relax, eat wonderful fresh seafood out on a deck while watching dolphins play in the bay, shopping and not worrying about where the bathroom was, walking on the beach and enjoying the warm Gulf waters.

[00:07:16] These are all things that a little over a year ago would not have been possible, and now they were.

[00:07:24] I want to step back from the logistics for a second because this is really the bigger message. Do not be afraid to get back out into your life. Some of us spend more time worrying about what might happen or what people might think.

[00:07:39] Who cares?

[00:07:41] Who cares if you have a urostomy?

[00:07:43] Who cares if someone notices it?

[00:07:46] Do not let it become the thing that stops you from living. Let it become the reason you do. Yes, things are different now, but different does not mean you are unable to enjoy life [00:08:00] again. And honestly, I think sometimes this becomes a second chance at life in ways we did not expect.

[00:08:08] It's not easy, but it's absolutely possible. And maybe, just maybe, you become the person who shows someone else that it is possible.

[00:08:19] So before we wrap up, if you found this helpful, you can find more podcast episodes, resources, and links to both of my books on my website at leakslaughslife.com.

[00:08:33] You can also connect with me there if you have questions or want to share your own experience. I truly do read everything, and I love hearing from you. And if this episode has helped you in any way, please share it with someone who might need to hear it today, because none of us are meant to figure this out alone.

[00:08:51] So until next time, get out and enjoy life, and I'll talk to you later!