SCARSTORIES · A LITTLE COMPANY ON THE WAY

Travel and flying

Yes, you can travel again after heart surgery — the real question is when and how, not whether. Here's how to plan it so the trip adds to your recovery instead of threatening it.

Returning to everyday life

> Educational content.

Yes, you can travel again after heart surgery — the real question is when and how, not whether. Travel after cardiac surgery is a planning exercise. Three things decide whether a trip adds to your recovery or threatens it: whether your body is ready for the journey itself, whether you're covered if something happens, and whether you carry the right paperwork.

Flying

For most people, short flights become realistic within weeks of an uncomplicated recovery, and longer flights within a few months — but the timing is individual, and it's set by your team, not by airline websites. Flying doesn't hurt a healed heart; what needs managing is long sitting (which increases the risk of blood clots), dehydration, and hauling luggage. Move your legs, walk the aisle when you're allowed, drink water, and don't lift your own case until your team clears that weight.

The checklist before you book

- Get clearance from your team for the specific journey — including when you can carry your own luggage.
- Sort travel insurance early, and declare your surgery honestly. A policy that doesn't know about your heart may refuse to pay if you need care abroad. This is the single most important travel decision you'll make.
- Carry your medication list in your hand luggage — with the boxes where possible — plus enough medicine for the whole trip and a few days beyond. Never put medicines in checked luggage.

- Ask your team for a short letter summarising your surgery, your medicines, and any implants such as sternal wires — useful for airport security and for any doctor who treats you abroad.
- Plan for the destination: heat, high altitude and long journeys all ask more of your body early in recovery. Choose destinations and itineraries with that in mind for the first months.

What to ask your team

Ask: “Am I cleared for this specific trip, and when can I lift my own suitcase?” Ask about compression stockings for long flights, how to manage your medicines across time zones, and what to do if you feel unwell away from home. Ask for the letter.

> **Take it to your team**
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> Ask: when can I fly after my procedure — short flights and long flights? What about long car journeys — how often should I stop and stretch? What should my travel insurance say about my surgery? Can you write me a letter for the trip?

> **Call for help if**
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> During or after travel you get chest pain, severe breathlessness, new or one-sided leg swelling, or fainting — don't wait until you're home. Contact local emergency services, and have your team's letter and medication list ready for the doctors treating you.

A last word

Travel after surgery is reclaiming your life — a sign of recovery, not a risk to it, once it's planned properly. The timing, the clearance and the paperwork belong to your own team. Let them tell you when the answer is “go — and enjoy it”.

Questions to take to my team

- [ ] When can I take short or long flights after my procedure?

- [ ] How often should I stop and move during long car journeys?

- [ ] What should my travel insurer know, and can I have a medical travel letter?

For discussion and personal reference. Your care team's individual instructions take priority. For an emergency, contact your local emergency service; do not wait for a community reply.