

Air Travel/TSA Tool

Step 1: Pre-Trip Planning and Packing

☐ **Never pack any of your prostheses in checked luggage.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Would you pack \$10,000 in cash in your checked luggage? No? Then why would you do the same thing with a prosthesis worth at least that much (and usually more)? Enough said.
- The Air Carrier Access Act gives you the right to bring your prostheses aboard the main cabin (and they do not count against your carry-on bag limit):

§382.121 What mobility aids and other assistive devices may passengers with a disability bring into the aircraft cabin?

(a) As a carrier, you must permit passengers with a disability to bring the following kinds of items into the aircraft cabin, provided that they can be stowed in designated priority storage areas or in overhead compartments or under seats, consistent with FAA, PHMSA, TSA, or applicable foreign government requirements concerning security, safety, and hazardous materials with respect to the stowage of carry-on items.

(1) Manual wheelchairs, including folding or collapsible wheelchairs;

(2) Other mobility aids, such as canes (including those used by persons with impaired vision), crutches, and walkers; and

(3) Other assistive devices for stowage or use within the cabin (e.g., prescription medications and any medical devices needed to administer them such as syringes or auto-injectors, vision-enhancing devices, and POCs, ventilators and respirators that use non-spillable batteries, as long as they comply with applicable safety, security and hazardous materials rules).

(b) In implementing your carry-on baggage policies, you must not count assistive devices (including the kinds of items listed in paragraph (a) of this section) toward a limit on carry-on baggage.

☐ **Choose the right seats (lower extremity amputees) when booking.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- If you do not plan on sleeping during the flight and/or know that you will need to use the bathroom at least once, consider selecting an aisle seat – much easier to stand up and move from there.
- If you prefer a window and you are a unilateral amputee, consider taking the window seat on the side of the plane *opposite* your amputation (e.g., if you are a left AK or BK, take the right window seat and vice versa). The reason for this is that the construction of some planes results in less leg space where the plane wall meets the floor, and you can more easily move your sound limb to accommodate for that than your prosthetic one.
- Avoid exit-row seats.



☐ **Do you need a wheelchair or other assistance when you get to the airport?**

❖ *Helpful Links to Major U.S. Airlines' Special Services*

[American Airlines](#)

[Virgin America](#)

[Delta](#)

[Alaska Air](#)

[United Airlines](#)

[Frontier](#)

[Southwest](#)

[Spirit](#)

[JetBlue](#)

- Some airlines allow you to request when you book ticket.
- All allow you to request at the airport with airline personnel.
- If you use a wheelchair, please make sure to tip the person who pushes you through the airport to your gate!

☐ **TSA will let you carry tools/items for your prosthesis in carry-on luggage:**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Put Allen Wrench, shoe horn, or similar tools in outside pocket of carry-on to prevent TSA from going through your entire carry-on bag looking for these items if they choose to inspect it.
- Liquids like anti-bacterial soap and skin-care products must be in containers less than 3.4 oz. if you want to carry them on – otherwise, must go in checked bag.
- Place all liquids like anti-bacterial soap and skin-care products in clear plastic zip lock bags in an external flap or pocket for easy access (see Step 2).

☐ **Always get your boarding pass before you leave for the airport!**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Electronic boarding passes prevent you from having to keep track of an extra piece of paper that, in the stress of traveling, inevitably ends up in a pocket, bag or backpack different from where you remember last seeing it.

If you are tech-averse, print out the boarding pass at home the night before. If the kiosks or computer systems go down when you arrive at the airport, you can still proceed through security like a champ.

Step 2: Airport Security

☐ **Know the Security Two-Step: What You Need to Show and When**

- ❖ #1: Entering the security line – you only need to show your boarding pass.
- ❖ #2: After entering security but before you/your luggage get checked – you need to show your boarding pass AND ID (drivers' license or passport), so have both ready.

☐ **Getting your items onto the security conveyer belt.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Take all zip lock bags with liquids in them out of your carry-on and place in a plastic bin.
- If you have a computer, put it in a separate plastic bin (unless you have a special TSA-compliant computer bag – if you don't know what that is, you don't).
- Empty your pockets of everything.
- DO NOT remove your shoes.

☐ **Full-body scanner v. X-Ray Machine.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Select the full-body scanner. (Traditional x-ray machine does not show the TSA agents exactly where the item causing the alarm is, so the resulting pat-down can be more invasive/take longer.)
- As you approach the full-body scanner and the TSA agent realizes you are wearing still wearing shoes, he/she will either tell you, "Remove your shoes" or ask, "are you TSA pre-check?" (Because TSA pre-check members do not have to remove their shoes.) Politely tell them that you wear a prosthesis. If they ask, "Can you remove the shoe on your other foot?" answer, "No – not safely." They will let you proceed.
- After the full-body scanner captures its image, you will need to undergo a quick physical examination by the TSA agent. It will usually consist of:
 1. A quick pat-down – sometimes of just the prosthesis, other times of your whole body. It will not take more than 30 seconds from beginning to end.
 2. A swabbing of your prosthetic leg to test for explosives. And
 3. A swabbing of your hands to test for explosives.
- At all times during this process, be polite and smile when talking to the agents. RELAX. The nicer and more cooperative you are, the faster you will get through it.



☐ **Avoiding false positives.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- Make sure your hands are clean before you go through the security checkpoint. Some skin care products – e.g., Vaseline, A&D ointment – contain petroleum jelly, which **will** register positive for explosives.
- Do not let these products rest loose in any of your luggage – isolate them in your zip lock bags. If TSA agents swab your carry-on and there are trace amounts of Vaseline or A&D in it, you'll get a false positive, they'll go through *everything*, and you'll be delayed.

☐ **I still got a false positive test for explosives. What do I do?**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- DO NOT PANIC. Stay calm. Do not act defensive.
- Show them you have nothing to hide – tell them to freely check your luggage. (They will do so whether you want them to or not, so might as well grin and bear it.)
- They may insist on you having a private screening at this point. They have a right to demand this. Unless you would like to get kicked out of the airport, do not resist – just make sure that at least two agents of your gender are present if this does occur. Stay cool.

☐ **Despite amp'd's advice, I had a bad TSA experience. What can I do?**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

- At the airport: elevate to a supervisor.
- Afterwards: If you believe TSA treated you unfairly or unprofessionally, you can file a complaint online – click [here](#) to access the form.

Step 3: Boarding the Plane

☐ **If you like getting on the plane early or are worried about overhead luggage space getting filled up, pre-board.**

❖ *Helpful Hint:*

- Anyone wearing a prosthesis can pre-board. If the gate agent looks at you curiously – this happens to Dave frequently because he wears long pants and doesn't "look" disabled – we have found that *asking* for permission to pre-board "because I wear a prosthesis" almost always results in a startled, "Of course!"

☐ **Be careful walking through the main cabin door.**

❖ *Helpful Hint:*

- The entry into a plane often has a lip or a small space that you can trip over. (Dave has done it.) So watch yourself.

☐ **Getting into your seat and organized.**

❖ *Helpful Hints:*

If you have both a carry-on that goes in the overhead bin *and* a smaller bag with a computer/tablet/Kindle in it, put the carry-on away first when you get to your seat. Do not put your personal bag under the seat in front of you until you have retrieved what you need for the flight from it. It can be hard – especially as an AK amputee – to bend over and snag that bag once the flight has started. (BONUS: if you are tall enough, hook the strap or handle of your personal item over the shoe on your sound limb – if you do need to get something mid-flight, you can simply lift your leg up and pull the entire bag onto your lap more easily.)

Step 4: Getting off the Plane

☐ **Don't rush.**

❖ *Helpful Hint:*

- You don't get bonus points for sprinting off a plane. The people behind you will still be behind you until you get to the jet bridge no matter how fast you walk. Airplane aisles are narrow and you are usually walking with luggage – go at a speed you are comfortable with.

☐ **Be careful walking out the main cabin door.**

❖ *Helpful Hint:*

- Same as coming onto the plane. Dave did a full gainer onto his stomach to mark his entry into Canada in 2016. You don't want to kiss the ground whenever you land – especially when it's not even your home country.

☐ **Stay to the right side if you walk up the jet bridge.**

❖ *Helpful Hint:*

- You usually have to go up a somewhat significant incline if you choose to walk into the terminal. The jet bridge will have handles on its sides. Don't hesitate to use them, especially when dragging or carrying bags. This also allows passengers who are in a rush to scurry on their way by passing you on the left.