

Making Accessible Restaurant, Hotel, Car, and Travel Reservations

By Deb Felt

Accessible Dining

Most restaurants will accommodate you, if you call ahead. If you make a reservation, come a little early and if you cannot come, make sure you that you call and cancel. **Here is a list of services that many restaurants will provide if you call ahead.**

- Even when a restaurant has steps at the main entrance, they may have **wheelchair accessible door** in the back or side. Some restaurants will provide a **ramp** for you.
- Restaurants can **reserve a table** that meets your needs— a table near the bathroom, etc.
- If you call ahead, restaurants can **reserve parking for you or offer valet parking** or escort you into the restaurant. If you need to double-park to drop-off, let the restaurant know.
- Many restaurants give better service during **off-hours**: at 11:00 or 1:00 for lunch; or early bird at 5:00 for dinner. We avoid trendy bars and restaurants on Fri. and Sat. nights, and visit them during the week. For weekend nights we dine early or chose a quiet neighborhood restaurant.
- If you need help reading a menu, waiters will help, but we recommend that you **get a copy of the menu ahead of time** (online, stop by, or call and ask about specials).
- Some of the older restaurants have restrooms in the basement. Do not assume this is the only restroom. Many restaurants also have **one-person restrooms** for the staff on the main level.
- If you have a favorite restaurant that is not accessible, stop-by and **talk to the owner**. Many owners, especially of locally owned establishments, will find a way to keep good customers.

After you arrive at the restaurant:

- You can request that the **cook cut your food** (salad, meat, or sandwiches). You can ask the wait staff to help you with **packaging**—creamers, sugar, wrapped napkins, to-go boxes, etc.
- Managers and receptionists can help you **open doors** (outside doors and bathroom doors). If the handicap access doors or cutouts are blocked (or not shoveled) tell the hostess or manager.

Reserving Accessible Hotel Rooms

It is not enough to call a hotel and ask for a handicap room or reserve a handicap room online.

People with disabilities have very different needs. The earlier that you make a reservation, the more likely that your needs will be met. Assume you will tire easily, your routines will be disrupted, and you will spend significant time in your room. Safety, comfort, and food availability are not optional. Here are some questions to ask.

- **Bathroom Grab Bars.** You can ask for rooms with bars on the right or the left side of the toilet. Many of the new hotels have rooms with both options and can meet your needs for safety.
- **Shower seat.** Many of the newer hotels have walk-in/wheel-in showers. If the bathroom does not have a built-in shower seat, you can request a shower seat. If you need a heavy duty shower seat, request one when you make the reservation or bring your own. (Don't assume heavy duty equipment.)
- **Bedside Commode.** If you need a bedside commode request one when you make the reservation. Many of the commodes are all-in-ones that can also be used as a shower seat and high-rise toilet seat with arm rest. Again, if you need heavy duty equipment: request it when you make the reservation, bring it, or send one ahead to a friend who lives nearby.

- **Lounge chair.** Request a lounge chair when you make the reservation. Many of the rooms have only a love seat, which does not provide adequate back support and leg elevation.
- **Food.** There is really nothing nicer than crashing and dining in. When looking for a hotel choose one with a good restaurant and room service; breakfast and happy hour buffets; or kitchen and shopping service.
- **Handicap parking and accessibility of the room.** Handicap rooms are usually in the corners on upper levels. It's a lot of walking. If you want ground level and closer parking, ask for it.
- **Appliances.** If you are staying for several nights, you can request a toaster oven, kettle, microwave, or whatever you need to heat up a few meals. It doesn't hurt to ask.
- **Accessible Vans.** Buses and hotel vans often **do not** have continuous grab bars from the curb to the seat (there's a large space where the driver sits and often a step from the aisle to the seat). If the hotel has a wheelchair accessible van, stroke survivors can safely walk onto **the wheelchair lift**. Ask the hotel to reserve handicap transportation when you reserve the room.
- **Laundry service** is important for extended stays.
- **Extras.** If there is a walk-in shower you will need **extra towels** to wipe water off the floor, for safety. You will also need **extra wash cloths** for refreshing yourself (the air in hotels is very dry), and **extra drinking glasses** for medication. You can ask for these items at the front desk the first night and then request it from room service after that.
- You may want to **invite friends to visit you at your hotel** to enjoy the pool and/or buffets, instead of visiting at their homes. If they visit you then you do not have to worry about accessibility and comfort—when you get tired, just ask visitors to visit in the lobby for a while.

Additional hotel services

- **Pharmacy.** The desk clerk can help you get the medication you need. If you run out of prescription medication, a pharmacy can dispense small quantities until they can check with your physician or pharmacy back home. Many hotels have a van service that can pick-up your medication or medical supplies, or they can arrange for delivery. Hospitals can dispense meds.
- If you want your **room temperature** warmer or cooler, talk to the room service attendant or leave a note. They will accommodate your request.
- **Emergency. Dial "0" and ask the desk clerk to dial 911.** The clerk will assist you. Make sure you take identifying information and a list of medications with you to the hospital.

Accessible Car Reservations

In the past, car rental businesses were not very accommodating to persons with accessibility requests because the companies could not guarantee the availability of a specific make and model car. If you need a car with specific dimensions (height or head room or trunk space) or specific modifications (turning knob, hand controls, etc.) or a wheelchair van contact the **disability hotline** of the rental organization. They will make every effort to get you the exact car or modification that you need. Here are a few links:

- Enterprise <https://www.enterprise.com/en/help/customers-with-disabilities.html> or call: 1 (844) 556-4935.
- Hertz <https://www.hertz.com/rentacar/rental-car-deals/Hertz-Wheelchair-Accessible-Vehicles> call: 1 800 801 122 .
- Alamo https://www.alamo.com/en_US/car-rental/customers-with-disabilities.html or call: 1 844 602-3271.

- **Local van rental organizations:** In many cities there are handicap van rental businesses that will rent or lease or sell or modify your vans and cars. In NE Ohio you can contact: <https://www.mobilityworks.com/wheelchair-vans-for-rent/> or call: 1-877-275-4915

Travel Planning Recommendations by Dr. Elizabeth Dreben

- Have realistic expectations.
- Include fun and relaxation for all: don't overtire the survivor.
- Advanced planning is essential...ask the stroke survivor their preferences, don't assume.
- Information will help reduce the anxiety.
- Prepare a list of usual routines and medicines: what is needed, helpful, and not required.
- Prioritize and be willing to cross things off.
- Build in rest periods.
- Be flexible and of good humor: be willing to make midcourse adjustments.

CSC Members' Recommendations about airline travel and cruises with wheelchairs:

You can see all of our travel papers and recommendations by going to our Website:

www.clevelandstrokeclub.org and looking at the right hand columns.

- Debra Kerper, Travel Agent at <https://easyaccesstravel.com/about-easy-access-travel/>
- Berenice Kleiman: <https://clevelandstrokeclub.files.wordpress.com/2007/08/sun-fun-3-9-15.pdf>
- Ellen Richman: <https://clevelandstrokeclub.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/ellen-newsletter.pdf>
- Cleveland Stroke Club Tips List
<https://clevelandstrokeclub.files.wordpress.com/2007/08/stroke-survivor-every-day-tips-feb-7-6-2017.pdf>
- Also access our newest version of our Northeast Ohio Resource list on our Website: www.clevelandstrokeclub.org at the top of the page and right hand column.