

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Airline acceptability of CPAP: is relevant information available on airlines' websites?

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Dear Sir,

In the Internet era, accessibility of information regarding obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and the use of Continuous Pressure Airway Pressure (CPAP) machines on commercial airline flights is more important than ever. British Thoracic Society (BTS) recommendations state that patients with OSA and significant oxygen desaturation should consider CPAP therapy during flight travel.¹ Most commercial airlines have Internet websites through which flights can be searched and booked without the need to recourse to an airline employee. Additionally, the proliferation of foreign and low-cost airlines has resulted in an increased choice of airline carriers for long-haul destinations.

In 2003, Banerjee *et al.*² reported that 82% of long-haul carriers they contacted allowed the use of CPAP machines on long-haul flights, though the information given by the airlines was inconsistent and many had no formal policy; the authors proposed that there is an increased risk of motor-vehicle accidents on disembarking when CPAP therapy was not used on long-haul flights, especially overnight flights. Studies (not during air travel) have shown rebound hypersomnolence in patients with OSA after one-night withdrawal from CPAP.³⁻⁴ However, little data exist regarding the effects of air travel on oxygenation in patients with OSA.

We aimed to provide an up to date record of which airlines providing long haul flights permit the use of CPAP during the flight, and whether this information is readily available via their websites. A complete list of airline companies servicing London Heathrow International airport was retrieved using its web page. Websites for all airline companies supplying long-haul flights were searched using the key search terms "CPAP" and "sleep apnoea" and also by simple 'navigation' from the home-page. Each web page was surveyed for its accessibility of information, and its availability of information on the use of in-flight CPAP.

Fifty-eight airline companies were identified. The web pages of two companies were not in English (Uzbekistan and Tunisia Air) and three websites were unavailable (South African Airways, Egypt Air and Jet Airways), leaving 53 accessible web pages to be included in the study. Using the search terms, only 12/53 (22%) displayed information regarding CPAP or sleep apnoea. CPAP information was navigable from the home-page in only 13 cases (25%). Eleven (21%) airlines permitted the use of CPAP (see Table 1) based on the information available from their website. However, only one airline (Continental Airlines) explicitly did not permit the use of CPAP and the remaining airlines had no mention of CPAP. None of the

Table 1. Airline companies that permit the use of CPAP in flight – based on information available by navigation of their websites.

British Airways	Israel El Al Airline	Cathay Pacific
Quantas	Northwest Airlines	Air Canada
Air New Zealand	Singapore Airlines	Air Transit
Air Maritius	Japan Airlines	

airlines that permitted CPAP provided a power supply – patients would need to provide their own dry powder / gel cell battery pack. All except two airlines required medical clearance for CPAP use. No airlines gave information on notice of carriage or costing via their website.

Thus, there is evidence that few airline companies provide information for passengers with OSA on the use of in-flight CPAP via their websites. This lack of information may discourage patients from using CPAP, especially during long-haul flights, and this will therefore increase the risk of motor vehicle accidents if patients drive a motor vehicle after landing. More research on the effects of long-haul flights on in-flight oxygenation in patients with OSA and somnolence after travel is necessary, and we encourage airlines to write formal policies regarding OSA in air travel.

Conflict of interest declaration

There are no conflicts of interest for any of the authors.

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