



## Successful Travel with MS

Presented by:

Yolanda Wheeler, PhD, CRNP, CPNP-AC, MSCN

### **Yahaira Rivera:**

Hello, everyone. Welcome and thank you for joining MSAA's live webinar, "Successful Travel with MS." During this presentation, Dr. Yolanda Wheeler will discuss tips and strategies to help you plan for travels with confidence. My name is Yahaira Rivera and I'm the Director of Mission Delivery and Program Development for MSAA and I'm honored to be your host for today's program. In case this is the first time you are joining one of our webinars, I would like to share some information about MSAA and review some housekeeping items.

MSAA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving lives today through vital services and support for the MS community. Our initiatives are designed to advance educational, wellness and supportive resources. Our free programs and services include a national helpline, equipment and cooling distribution programs, educational programs, award winning publications, shared management tools, a peer to peer online forum, and more. For more information about our programs and services, please visit our website, [mymsaa.org](http://mymsaa.org).

And now, just a couple of reminders. During tonight's program, you will have the opportunity to submit your questions by using the Q&A chat box. As time permits, questions will be addressed during the Q&A portion of tonight's webinar. Also, please know that the program is being recorded and will be available as an on demand video on our MSAA's Video Library within the next couple of weeks. At the end of the program, we ask that you please complete a brief survey. Your feedback is extremely important and will help us develop future content and programs. A link to this survey will be included in the chat box.

As a friendly reminder, this program is for educational and informational purposes only and does not constitute formal recommendations. Please speak with your doctor for specific questions or concerns.

And now I am pleased to introduce our guest speaker for this evening. Dr. Yolanda Wheeler is an assistant professor and nurse researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing. In addition to her duties as a professor at the nursing school and various research endeavors with the US Network of Pediatric MS Centers, she has been a nurse practitioner at the UAB's Center for Pediatric Onset Demyelinating Disease for nearly 18 years, where she cares for children and their families with MS and other diseases. Doctor Wheeler is a long time volunteer, and she's also a patient advocate and has collaborated with organizations such as MSAA to ensure that patients and their families receive quality and equitable care. She is also a

member of MSAA's Health Care Advisory Council and our African American Advisory Board. Welcome, Dr. Wheeler, we are so excited to have you and about tonight's topic, and we're all eager to dive into all the learning alongside you.

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

Thank you so much. I am so excited to be here. When we decided on a topic, I thought, oh, this is an awesome topic to talk about. Just sharing a personal experience, I had a good friend who had recently been diagnosed with MS, and she tells me that she canceled her trip because she didn't know how to manage, and I just felt so bad for her. And she lost money, she lost time having fun, all because she thought she could not deal with the challenges that it may have imposed having MS. And so I was excited to... I'm excited to talk about this topic with you guys tonight, and I hope you'll get something very practical and something that you can take away from this presentation. Tonight we'll start out, we'll talk about some general tips for fun and safe travel when you have multiple sclerosis. We will discuss some travel specific guidelines for traveling by air, cruise, bus, train or even automobile. I'll also offer some suggestions about traveling to vacation rentals, and then I'll provide some guidance on traveling with medications and other necessary items.

So let's get started. Traveling advice. General traveling advice. The thing that I want you to keep in mind that you need to be flexible with your plans. Plan way off far and ahead of your trip. Having multiple sclerosis can pose trips, as we know, you can have symptoms that may come and go. And so you want to plan things ahead of time, and you want to have your plans clearly laid out. Call ahead of time for any assistance you might need, and we'll get into the logistics of that for each specific type of travel as we move through the presentation tonight. But also consider working with your travel agent or your booking agent, whoever is overseeing your travel. Work with them directly. Don't allow someone else who may be the group travel person to speak to your individual needs. Do that yourself.

Plan out your trip itinerary. You may be going on a cruise, for instance, but those other activities that you're doing alongside of the cruise or outside of the cruise, you need to have that itinerary mapped out. Get travel insurance. I always suggest, no matter where you're going, how long you're going to be gone, get that travel insurance to cover just in case you may not be able to go. Consider your personal risk that you may have when traveling. Say, for instance, you're going to the Sahara Desert and it's going to be a 110 degrees. You probably don't need to go if you have heat related fatigue. So think about where you're going, how you're going, and what it's going to take for you to get there. Ensure that you stay well before you go. That means don't burn the midnight oil getting ready for the trip and being ready for that trip and not being able to enjoy it because you haven't got the appropriate rest, you haven't gotten the... you don't have the things that are necessary for you to travel.

I tell people with MS, I tell my young adults and teenage patients, build up your stamina. It's like you deciding that you want to go out for the football team, but you haven't worked out all summer. You've got to build up stamina. That means if you're not on an exercise program or some health related regimen, you want to be able to keep up. So you can't wait until the week before and start saying, oh, I'm going to try to walk around the block a couple of times and then be able to keep up on the trip that you're going on, you want to be able to enjoy it. So, build up that stamina so that you can withstand and be able to go through that trip and have fun.

Also, talk to your immune specialists or your clinician about your plans. They may have some suggestions, some great suggestions for you as you're traveling. Travel with a reliable partner if at all possible. It's always great to have someone that knows you, that knows the symptoms that

you experience most frequently, because they may be able to identify some things that you may not see in yourself. Ask for reasonable assistance. When you do ask for assistance, don't ask for unreasonable accommodation. You know, they're not going to put you beside the captain's room because you have multiple sclerosis. So ask for something very reasonable. Think about the things that you really need to travel. Review vaccine requirements. A lot of times when two people are traveling overseas or traveling to foreign countries, there may be some specific vaccination requirements, but you may be exempt from them because of your disease and the medications that you're on. So you may need a note saying, I could not get vaccinated against this or that because I have multiple sclerosis and they'll want a, you know, a clinician or a MS specialist or your PCP to write that note and have that note attached to your travel documents. Next slide, please.

So let's talk about traveling by air. Traveling by air is my most fun way to travel because you get there fast, you can get there fast and you don't spend a lot of time in a vehicle trying to get there. When you're going to book travel by air, always talk directly to the agent about your needs in advance. Again, the first caveat that I said was make advance plans. Ask for a travel aid or wheelchair assistance if needed when you're traveling. It's also, it's very nice when you have that traveling assistance, but you got to request these things ahead of time, because they, the airlines, the airports, they schedule these based on travel needs that are ahead of time. They might not have the aids that you need if you don't request it ahead of time.

If you've never gone through TSA PreCheck or through Clear check, I would recommend that highly. TSA PreCheck is about \$85 or so. Clear, my understanding, is a little bit more expensive, but these things help you get through the line without having to do all the searches. You don't necessarily have to take your shoes off. You can kind of get through the line with minimal requirements for checking through the checkpoints. You should call 72 hours prior to traveling to request assistance with a passenger support specialist. At the checkpoint, there'll be somebody that's standing there waiting for you to help you and assist you to get through the checkpoint.

Have a note from your provider about injectable medications or any other medications that you may have to travel with that may be questionable. Have that note ready to show at that checkpoint so no one will question the medication that you're carrying on you. If you're a mobile, purchase a seat in an area to provide you with the most comfort, and that means saving some money ahead of time as well. They have, now, all these different types of seats, comfort plus, and it's for a few extra dollars, you're not going to break the bank, but it will give you the comfort that you may need if you're going to be on a long flight or if you're going to have to change, have multiple flight exchanges through multiple legs of your trip through air. So consider doing those kind of purchases so that you'll be the most comfortable while you're on the flight. Next slide please.

This is another slide on traveling by air. If you're immobile, request an aisle wheelchair on the plane. Now, what I will say about aisle wheelchairs, they're very narrow. They're very... I want to say they're only a foot, maybe a foot and a half wide. You may need to take your assistive device for transferring if you're wheelchair bound or you're immobile, you know, from the waist down. You may need to take an assistive device, such as a sliding board. Talk to the travel agent ahead of time if you have any sensitivities like you don't have feeling in your legs, or you have spasms. You want them to be aware of what kind of issues you may be dealing with, because you want them to be careful if you don't have feeling in your legs, you want to be able to communicate that so that you don't get injured and you have a smooth trip as you're traveling. If you have bladder issues, you may ask for a seat near the bathroom. You may choose a seat

near the bathroom, or wear incontinence undergarments the day of the flight so that you don't have to get up during the flight.

Do not book close connecting flights. If you have 3 or 4 legs to your flight, you don't want to book them so close together where you cannot get from one plane to the other without missing your flight. I always leave a couple of hours in between your connecting flight so that you're able to, if you have to use the bathroom, if you have to gather your thoughts, you have to just get yourself together, if you have to have a snack in between flights, don't have those connecting flights so close where you cannot make it.

If you're traveling with your own personal device, ask for it after each leg of the flight. It is your right to ask for your wheelchair, your personal wheelchair, in between each flight. And I know you're thinking, why would I do that if I'm using the wheelchair that belongs to the airport? Well, you want to make sure, number one, that your personal device has not been damaged in any way. You want to lay eyes on that personal wheelchair. It is your right. You may get someone that tells you that, Oh, we can't get it for you. They can get that wheelchair for you. You can ask for your personal wheelchair between each leg of your flight. When checking your mobility device in, attach something written on a laminated card that tells them how to store it and how to set it up.

Say, for instance, you are on, you're going from, and I stay in Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama, and I'm traveling to California, if I have two legs to my flight, and my second stop is in Austin, Texas, and they damage my wheelchair in Austin, Texas, and I gotta stop somewhere else before I get to California, I'm not going to know where my wheelchair was damaged, and nobody's going to take ownership if I don't know where it was damaged. So that's the importance of making sure that your particular device has no injury to it, because it'll be, it may be inoperable, and then you will have to rent a wheelchair or come up with some other solution once you get to your destination. Download the Air Travel Bill of rights and read that very carefully before you travel. If you've never traveled on an airplane before and you have a physical disability. Also, you may not have disabilities that are seen by the eyes, because a lot of MS symptoms and not seen by the visible eyes. They are what they call invisible symptoms. I would recommend if you got to do a lot of traveling by air, that you take a look at that Air Travel Bill of Rights. Next slide.

Next we're going to talk about cruise traveling. So I've been on a bunch of blogs for MS patients, and they say cruise travel is the best, cruise travel for people with MS. And you say, why is that? Because you have a place where you get to your destination. The cruise has a place where you can go lay down and take rest. Nobody really misses you because everybody's on the boat and having fun. You can go rest at any time, day or night. You have medical officials on the boat with you. They have handy accessible cabins that are there and accessible to you. You have all this accessibility. So they say from the blogs that cruise travel is the best travel for patients with multiple sclerosis.

Again, start out with your booking or your travel agent and let them know your needs and your abilities. Request the accommodations for that room, that assessable room, if you need a handicap accessible room, because it is first come, first serve. Request accommodations. Say you're going to stay at a hotel the night before, request those accommodations for your hotel and request those accommodations to get you from that hotel to your docking port so that all that is laid out ahead of time. Discuss also the use of your personal devices that you may need, and make sure that the room has proper fitting. Some of the doors on a cruise ship are very narrow, but for those rooms that are handicap accessible, they are a little bit larger. So make

sure if you need it because of devices that you're using, whether it's a mobilized wheelchair or manual wheelchair, that you request those things so you have the wide doors for the rooms. Also, make sure that they have the equipment in there, such as handrails and other things, that you may need.

Consider renting equipment, and I'll share with you a personal experience very briefly. I had a knee replacement last year. My husband and I had already scheduled a cruise, and I decided not to take my rollator. At the time that I went on the cruise, I was on a rollator and I decided not to take my rollator. And you say, well, why would you do that? I had the opportunity, I called ahead of time, I found out that a lot of the... well, all of the cruise ports have contracts with DME supply groups, and I was able to rent an actual rollator when I got to the cruise port. It was awesome. They had it waiting for me. I used it the whole entire trip. It had a little insurance associated with it, so, again, that was an additional cost that I needed to consider, and I left it when I left. I didn't have to worry about my own personal equipment getting damaged. So if at all possible, check into those kind of things as well.

Again, pay the extra money for that cruise insurance or that travel insurance, so just in case you're not able to go or something happens, it will cover those costs that you may have accrue. Choose excursions. And that's one thing about cruise ships, is a lot of excursions. Choose those excursions early and book those handicap accessible tours. For those that have fatigue or heat related fatigue, book those excursions that you know are going to keep your body cool and you're not going to be in crisis mode when you're on a trip. Next, slide.

So, bus travel. Bus travel, again, consider your booking agent that you're booking with, whether it's a local bus, if it's a charter bus, think about your needs that are associated with boarding and deboarding the bus. Think about any assistance you may need with your luggage and stowing or in retrieving your personal assistive devices if you have wheelchair needs or other needs, such as helping with or assistance with getting onto the bus and getting off of the bus. But talk to that booking agent when you book your trip, before you book your trip, talk to them and tell them what your needs are so that everybody's on the same page, and everybody is clear about what your needs are. Next slide.

Plans for going on a road trip. So road trips can be challenging for individuals with MS because you're in a car most of the time for some hours. I say if you're booking a trip that's 12 hours long, you may want to decide to start off one day, ride in a car for six hours, get some good sleep, and then continue your trip the next morning after you've had some rest. Think about any ongoing symptoms that may be impacted by you traveling in a car for long periods of time. Ensure that you have handicap appropriate permits. And I bring this up because I was reading some literature, and I didn't realize this, that when you travel, if you have a placard versus an actual license plate, the rules are different. Every state honors other states' license plates, but they don't necessarily honor those temporary placards that you hang on your front mirror. And I did not realize this. So if you're traveling three states over, you might want to check with the DMV of that state to make sure that they honor your handicap permits that are actually placards and are kind of temporary. Contact your local or national rental car companies if you need hand controls on your vehicle that you're renting or other features that you may need. And also consider local wheelchair van rentals if you need a van that's wheelchair accessible. So those are just some things to think about on your road trip. Next slide please.

If you're traveling by train, again, make reservations for an accessible space. A lot of trains, if you've ever been on a train, they have... their seats are much larger. To me, they're more comfortable. They have more leg room. But say you need to take your mobility wheelchair or

you need to take a wheelchair along your trip, find out what kind of accessible space they have on their train. Discuss the guidelines that they may have that will accommodate different types of devices that you may have, discuss, again, boarding, detraining, and layover procedures that may take place when it comes to a train, because oftentimes trains will stop and have various stops, and if your stop is temporary, that's not that big of a deal. But say they have a stop where you're there for a couple of hours or an hour and you want to know what the process is for detraining and layover procedures when you're traveling by train. So ask those questions when you're calling and making your reservations. Next slide please.

Vacation rentals. So vacation rentals are an interesting and new and upcoming thing for a lot of families. You want to reach out to Airbnb or Vrbo and ask about their accessible rental properties. You also want to speak to the renters before your final booking to ensure that they have the things that you need, whether this be handrails, wide doors and entryways, elevator access. You know, if you go to a Airbnb or a vacation rental, there's a two story property and you don't have access to the second floor, that may or may not put you at a disadvantage, but you won't know that until you ask. Some people may be comfortable with staying on the first floor of an Airbnb or a vacation rental facility or property. But if it's something that you need to inquire about, then you need to ask about it before you actually book and make that final booking choice. Again, obtain travel insurance. I cannot stress that enough, because that will ensure that you don't lose money when you're trying to book successful travel. Next slide.

Traveling with medication. So, you know, a lot of MS patients are on various medications. Some of you all take narcotics for pain, or controlled substances. And you want to make sure you have written clearance from your, whether it be your MS clinician, whether it be your PCP, somebody that is authorizing you the use of medications that you're traveling with. Also make sure that you take enough medications, extra medications, but also make sure when you're traveling, especially if you're traveling by air or you're in a position where someone else is dealing with your luggage, such as a cruise, you want to always have your medication on hand with you. You want it to be a carry on item. You don't want your luggage to be delayed and it's time for your dose of medication and you don't have it, or you don't want your bags to get lost, and you're like, oh my gosh, I don't have my medicine because it was in the bag. So make sure you have your medications or any kind of medications you're taking on you at all times. Consider if you're going to do injectables, consider to have some insulated bags to keep your medication below high levels. You know, if you're traveling, you may be going to places where it is extremely hot and you want to have that medication cooled down and you can always put it at room temperature once you get to your destination. Next slide.

Other items to take. So, think about transfer equipment, just like I said before, if you have things that you need to help accommodate you getting from one area to another, if you have a pad that you use for transfer, or a board, you may want to take that with you. Also, consider portable handrails, if you have beds that are higher than yours at home, you may want to use those portable handrails to take with you. They have all types of different equipment out nowadays. You can find anything on Amazon, can't you? Again, take extra medication. You don't want to get to a place and you're out of your medication. If you need to speak to the pharmacist before you leave and say, hey, I'm going on a trip, I'll, be gone for X number of days and I'm almost out of my meds. Is there something that can be done? They can always make a phone call to your care provider and figure out about medication. Take a copy of your contact information, your emergency contact information. Also consider taking, like, those things, like, incontinence pads or garments that you may need. Take a list of your itinerary, so that they know where you are traveling to if you were to get an emergency. Also, consider getting a medical bracelet that

identifies you as having multiple sclerosis. And other things would include, like, cooling vests and cooling packs. to keep your body cool and to lower your temperature. Next slide.

Close to travel time. Again, I can't emphasize getting plenty of rest. You don't want to burn the midnight oil and be up 20 hours before your trip, and then you get on your trip and you're so exhausted and fatigued, you can barely hold your eyes open. You want to be able to enjoy that trip, so you need to get plenty of rest. Start taking your vitamins and start thinking about getting your stamina again built up so that you can enjoy that trip. Write out a packing plan. And what I tell people that I know are traveling, consider the things you need versus the things you want. I'm a bad packer. I'll take 20 items and I only use five. Well, think about how much energy you expend on packing all this stuff and taking all this stuff with you that you're really not going to use. Just consider taking the things that you need versus the things that you want when you're packing and making that packing list.

Think about all the things that can happen. What happens if I'm in a relapse? What kind of things would I need if I were in a relapse? Make sure you take a list of not only your emergency contact, but the other thing I should add is your providers, the names and phone numbers of your providers, and how to get in contact with your providers who are providing care for you, because it may be something as simple as having a conversation between one provider to another where you are. Check the weather. Figure out if it's going to be 102 degrees where you're going. This may help you to decide, okay, I'm going to take a bunch of cooling vests. I'm going to invest in a cooling vest. I've never had one before, but this may be good if I'm going. Figure out if there's humidity where you're going, because that may help you decide what things you need to take as far as clothing are concerned, packing a water bottle, those kind of things. So check the weather before you go.

Consider, discussing your plans with your travel buddy. And a travel buddy can be so important when you have something like multiple sclerosis, because that travel buddy is that person that doesn't rush you, that's understanding, that understands what you're going through. You want to take someone with you like that, if at all possible. But also, sit down with them and discuss the plans for when you travel and they may be that person who's saying to you, I think you probably need to go rest because you're looking like you're about to pass out. And they can recognize it before it even happens. And so discussing your plans with your travel buddy would be a great option when you're getting close to traveling and you're near your time to travel. Next slide.

And lastly, reporting discrimination. It's so important that your rights are not violated when you're traveling, it's so very important. When you're traveling by air, you can file a complaint if you ever think your rights are being violated. You can contact... you can file a complaint with the airline or through the US Department of Transportation, Aviation Consumer Protection Division. You can, if you're traveling by cruise, you can contact the ship's gate services office. You can contact the cruise line's customer service, or even contact a maritime attorney. Some cruise lines have their own attorney that is vetted in taking reports of discrimination. If you're on a bus traveling, you can file a complaint with the transit agency that you're using, if you feel like your rights and violated or you're discriminated against. You can also contact the Federal Transit Administration, Office of Civil Rights, or the Federal Department of Justice. And then if you're traveling by train, you can contact the ADA coordinator or call Amtrak's customer relations or file a complaint with the Federal Railroad Administration's Office of Civil Rights. I hope that you don't ever travel and have discrimination, but we know that it does happen, and filing a complaint means we're making people aware that we realize that you all should not have your rights violated because you have a disability. I hope that this series has helped you. I hope that this webinar has helped you to start to begin your plans in traveling, because you can travel and

you can have a great time and you can have fun despite having something like multiple sclerosis.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you so much, Dr. Wheeler, for such an informative presentation. We truly appreciate all the information and tips that you shared with us about traveling with MS. Now we have some time to go over some questions from the audience, and we're going to start with this one: How can I feel comfortable traveling with MS if it causes me so much stress?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So, the big thing I think is, again, can't emphasize the fact of planning ahead of time. Putting someone in that you're going to travel with to help you sort out all the details, because I think that's the biggest challenge. You're thinking about 50,000 things. You're thinking about what to pack, what to wear, where I'm going. And if you have somebody that can help you sort out the details of travel. Again, depending on how or what mode of travel you're going to be using, contact those travel agents. Sit down with that travel agent and have a conversation, before you even decide where you're going, about your needs and your abilities, but not your disabilities, but talk to them about your abilities. What can you do? What do you want to do? And figure out a realistic plan for travel. Traveling can be overwhelming, even when you don't have something like MS. But I think you just need to talk your steps out with you about traveling and what you want to do. And figure out who that person is, whether that's a loved one, a friend, or whomever. Even talking to your healthcare provider. I advise all MS patients to sit down and have a conversation with their healthcare provider about their potential travel in the future so a plan can be devised.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

That's great advice. Thank you so much. Our next question is: How do you find out about supportive services they have at the destinations you're going to?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So that's an interesting question. I would start out by, if you're going to a destination resort, calling that resort ahead of time. Again, reaching out, if you have a travel agent, reaching out to that travel agent and asking those important questions, what kind of services do they offer for individuals with disabilities? Public resorts, that is a requirement that they have a plan for individuals with disabilities. And so, reaching out to those agencies, reaching out to those resorts or places that you're visiting, to ask them what their services are for individuals with disabilities would be the number one plan that I would suggest.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you for that. We have a couple of participants asking if they can have a copy of this presentation because they've found this so informative. So I want them know that we are recording the program and alongside the video on our website, we can definitely post a PDF so that you can access these and share with friends and family members. So no worries, it will be available within the next couple of weeks. We also have a comment in the chat, it says I have trouble with rental cars at my airport. How can I convince them to bring the car to me?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So, and I'm not sure what airport you're at, I know, and it depends, airports are very different, you can have a small airport, you can have gigantic airports. I always get frightened when I have to go through Atlanta-Hartsfield airport, it just unnerves me. No matter if wheelchair bound



or what, I'm just like... And so, that is an interesting concept. I would start off with the airport itself and ask if there is someone that can assist you to go to the airport. I'm wondering if the airport is adjacent to, because sometimes the car rental places are off-sight from the airport. Also, contact the car rental place because it may be feasible for them to have a driver to bring you, you know, the same situation that you have when you're renting a car after you've had an accident or your car is in the shop and they will transport you to your job while your car is being worked on. So, in my mind, I don't see any difference, but I would contact the car rental agency and also contact the airport to see who can provide the best services for you, because they don't really get the understanding that, you know, it may be difficult for you to get to the airport for your rental.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you for that. So definitely doing some research, calling in advance to make sure that you have all the details available.

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

Yes.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

And it kind of depends on the airport.

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

Yes.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

So our next question is: How can I combat fatigue when I'm traveling?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So, and I love talking about fatigue, fatigue is a silent symptom that, you know, you can have on a bathing suit and look like a million dollars but feel crappy on the inside. I would say fatigue can be combated by getting adequate rest before you travel, not getting overexerted, like again, packing too much stuff, and then you got to lug around a big, large amount of luggage. Getting adequate sleep before you travel. Those things, like not getting overheated. Fatigue is so challenging. I would have a conversation with your MS specialists about how you can combat your fatigue before traveling. But those things are rest, sleep, again, building up the stamina to travel. And sometimes those things may or may not help, but those things may help you to get through traveling. Don't, you know, don't do, if you can break up the legs of travel, don't do it all in one day, if at all possible. Like I said, if you're going on a road trip and you know you got to travel 12 hours, you don't want to try to do that whole 12 hours in one day. I would really have a conversation with your primary care doctor, I mean your MS specialist, about how to combat your fatigue. Consider fatigue medication. But yes, I would have a conversation with your MS specialist about fatigue and traveling, because that can be very difficult and very challenging for individuals.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you for that. For participants who are traveling, for example, this one says you can take... can you take your own scooter or walking device when flying, and if so, how does that work? And I'm assuming the question is do they need to check it in as luggage, or they can carry that for them until they board the plane. How does that work?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So if you are mobile, you can take your walking device, like if you mean a walking stick, of course you can take those. A rollator or something of that nature depends on how big your plane is. The larger the plane, you know, the bigger the middle aisle, the smaller planes usually cannot accommodate your own motor device. And so you have to have them basically put you in, what I call, a wheelchair accessible wheelchair once you get to the door. And then once you get to the door, what they'll do is take your device and put it up under the plane. Again, like I said earlier, you need to have instructions on your device. I would get laminated instructions and hang it on your device with a tag that tells them exactly how to fold your wheelchair, how to store your wheelchair, because what you don't want to happen is your wheelchair to be damaged in flight. And if they don't do it properly, they don't store it properly, it may be damaged. But if at all... you know, most of the large, large planes have an aisle seat that is able to... is handicap accessible. But again, that will call for you calling and making your reservation and telling them the things that you need.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

That's great advice, Dr. Wheeler, thank you so much. Our next question says: I'm traveling solo. How can I feel more confident about traveling?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So, traveling solo means, depending on your mode of travel, letting people be aware of your experiences. And, I mean, you know, the simple things like if you're traveling by air for instance, and you're traveling alone, letting that, airline stewardess that's on that plane, that's attending, or the airline attendant know, okay, I have MS, you know, what symptoms you may be experiencing while you're in the air, those type of things. I would suggest if you're traveling by yourself, that you have, again, a list of your emergency contacts, get you a medical alert bracelet so people are aware in case you get in a crisis situation. Again, get the rest, get the things that build up your stamina so you can endure your trip. But also make yourself safe by having on you your emergency contacts, those type of things.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you. Our next question is: I'm on a medication that lowers my immune system. How do I travel, other than masking, to protect myself from viruses and bacteria?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

My number one thing, and I've been a nurse for 27 years, wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands. Plenty of hand sanitizer. Of course, mask. A lot of people are leery about vaccinations, but if at all, get vaccinated. If you're comfortable with vaccinations, get vaccinated, vaccinated against COVID and the flu and any other things you may come in contact with, in close quarters when you're traveling. But masking is great, of course. Handwashing. A lot of things are transmitted by hands and touching. And just think about how the hands that touch a plane in one flight. And so, again, build up your immune system by doing vitamin C, vitamin D, zinc supplements. Those type of things can help you with your immune system.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Our next question is: I will be traveling from the US to Germany later this year. Do you have any advice for a long flights?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

Again, I don't know what type of plane you're on, it's important to find out about the type of plane you're on, what size of the plane, how much leg room you're on, I mean, how much leg room you have in the plane. If at all, you can upgrade to a comfort seat so that you can relax and stretch out. It would be great. And the comfort seats are not as expensive like as first class. But they give you a little more comfort in flying. Make sure you hydrate well, make sure you're able to be mobile and get up and stretch while you're in flight, those types of things. Anything that will give you a little more comfortable seat. I'm not sure how long the flight is to Germany, but you want to be comfortable that whole entire time.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you. And we have a comment. Someone that shared a suggestion. It says that if you're traveling to visit friends or family members that perhaps you can send ahead of time some of the items so they don't have to carry that much with them. I think that's a great tip to make the travel time, and not carrying so much heavy luggage with them. Our next question is: How to keep cool and not overheat, especially when traveling to those destinations like Texas or other states or other countries where it's extremely hot?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

So I suggest cooling devices. They have all types of cooling devices now, and they used to be, you know, very restrictive. You had to order them online. And now you can go to your local hardware stores or Walmart and get cooling neck wraps. You can do simple things like ice in a Ziploc bag, and you want to drop your core temperature. So that means putting ice bags up under your armpits or in in your groin area. It will drop your temperature amazingly fast. Be well hydrated in those hot and humid places, like Alabama - it's almost 8 p.m. here and it's probably 92 degrees outside. And so using sensible things - Ziploc bags, you can get ice packs, you can get those beads that you kind of just stick in the refrigerator and use those. They're not expensive. But you want to just keep your body temperature lower. Wear cool clothes, wear clothing that moves air, and it might be sports gear, because, you know, it moves air because it's designed for you to keep cool when you're exercising. Always dress in layers so that you can come out of layers if you need to, especially if you feel like your heating, your body is heating up. You know you can get cold on a plane because they got the temperature down, but the time when they open the airplane door, the heat hits you. So dress comfortably where you can shed out of items that you may not need once you get off the plane, or once you get out of whatever mode of transportation you're on.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you so much, Doctor Wheeler, for taking the time to answer our questions. Before we come to our end of this program, do you have any last word of advice for our viewers about traveling?

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**

My advice is to have fun. You just gotta have a plan and you gotta think it through. You know, my motto is if you wait til the last minute, you gotta spend a lot of money that you can use on souvenirs versus things that you hadn't processed and thought out. And so, just take time and plan out your events. I think that everyone is capable of having fun and traveling if they just take the time to plan out their travel and just have an itinerary, have your agenda, and have the best time of your life.

**Yahaira Rivera:**

Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Wheeler, for your valuable insights on traveling with MS. I think your advice has really inspired confidence and excitement in planning trips with care. To our friends at home, remember, like she said, with good preparation and planning and conversations with your healthcare providers, traveling and exploring new places is absolutely possible. So embrace the journey ahead and happy travels.

This concludes our webinar. On behalf of MSAA, we want to thank Dr. Wheeler for her support and dedication to the MS community. And to all of you at home, thank you so much for participating. Remember that this program was recorded and it will be archived on our MSAA's website within the next couple of weeks. Please take a minute to complete the brief survey. Take care, happy travels, and have a wonderful evening. Bye bye everyone.

**Dr. Yolanda Wheeler:**  
Bye bye.