

“Accessible Bathing While Traveling”

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What a joke! Unfortunately, it is really a sad commentary on the options available for most individuals with real disabilities. And, too often, the lack of truly viable bathing options when traveling has resulted in simply the resignation to stay home, where the only potential accessible bathing may be. But that does not have to be the case anymore.

Trip planning for individuals with disabilities has traditionally been a very real problem. Hotels that claim to offer accessible rooms may have only a very small percentage of their rooms set up for accessibility, usually fewer than 5 or 6 in total, or they may only really be offering a bathtub with a grab bar, or a bench at the far end of the bathtub but water controls at the front. These options are not easy to negotiate for many quads or paraplegics who, even if they can get into the tub or onto a bench, cannot control water temperature or flow. Cleaning crews may use cleaning agents that leave a slick residue—a perfect set up for falling-- even when access has been possible. Or a room may have doors which do not allow for total wheelchair access. You know what I’m talking about.

But, there are now solutions for travelers, and many of these solutions are compact, light-weight, and very affordable. Whether a person is in a wheelchair due to spinal cord injury, ALS, or simply age-related weakness or instability, the options now exist to meet all the basic personal care needs—including showering—and allowing for the continuation of an active lifestyle.

There are a few keys to easy and dignified traveling which can open a whole new, stimulating world of experiences, no matter what an individual’s disability may be. By asking specific questions, and obtaining a few essential support items, you can ensure that you can have a pleasant experience in spite of the present lack of accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

First, let me identify the key phases of travel which have been of concern:

Transportation and Access:

- Ramps to get in and out of vehicles and locations
- Transporting of support equipment

Lodging:

- Moving around in a room once you have arrived
- Getting in and out of tall beds
- Being able to bathe safely, without concerns for falling or scalding
- Accessing toileting facilities

Maintaining Health:

- Body temperature control
- Preventing and treating skin dyscrasias and body sores
- Keeping essential equipment as well as yourself clean and odor-free

To make sure that there are no problems with any of these elements critical to travel, the first thing to do is to **ASK QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU TRAVEL**. Call ahead to the locations where you plan to stay, or to attractions you intend to visit. Ask very specific questions about their wheelchair access into the location, the size of all door-openings with the room, the layout of the room to ensure that there is sufficient maneuvering room, the bed height, light switch heights, and all personal hygiene support. Other questions to ask include:

Does the bathroom have enough space to turn around in the wheelchair, does the shower allow you to roll in to bathe, (or will you need to transfer from your chair), does the hotel provide bars or floor grip supports to prevent slipping, to name a few.

The next critical requirement is to **PROVIDE YOUR OWN ENVIRONMENT** when you can. If you are concerned that you may have difficulty getting into or out of a vehicle or a building, a short, light weight aluminum ramp section can satisfy the issues of access.

Portable shower stalls can address the needs of bathing, both on the road and in hotels. The FAWSsit™ Fold Away Wheelchair Shower, for example, was designed specifically for use in the home, when re-modeling for accessibility is not an option, and for travel. This fold away shower stall is completely assembled, but folds flat to less than 8 inches, and weighs less than 30 pounds. Because it has its own waste-removal pump, water which flows into the drain pan is pumped out and can be deposited straight down a sink drain. The water source for the shower head is simply a water faucet, and the shower stall can be set up anywhere within about 12 feet of a sink. This makes it ideal for use anywhere there is access to warm water. Furthermore, there is a hard-sided case on wheels which can be used for easy transport and shipping. And, Care Giver Support Products, manufacturers of the FAWSsit™ portable showers, also sell a travel shower/commode wheelchair in a travel case, to make the entire bathing experience complete for travelers. This solution is a great low cost alternative to home bathroom remodeling as well. The FAWSsit™ showers require no assembly, tools, or modifications and it costs about 1/10th as much as an accessible bathroom remodel.

The portable shower and portable shower/commode chair can truly open up the world of travel possibilities for nearly every individual with a disability. And, the best part is that the individual with a disability can maintain both dignity and health by staying clean!

If you have concerns about taking any of these items on an airplane, I checked with three of the large carriers and they all confirmed that there is no problem with checking a portable shower stall in its hard plastic travel case as well as a portable shower/commode wheelchair in its travel case. This equipment is considered necessary, and is checked in the same manner as any other required durable medical equipment.

Travel and recreation have been very difficult for many people with disabilities. But now, with a clear understanding of the environment you are going to, and the portable equipment to support the basic requirements for daily living, you can travel without concern for your daily needs.

For more information on the FAWSsit™ Fold Away Wheelchair Shower and travel chair, contact Care Giver Support Products at either 1-877-FAWSsit (329-7748), or www.fawssit.com.

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