

Travel can be stressful, especially for some autistic & neurodivergent people. Whether traveling locally or long distance, it can feel unpredictable and overwhelming. As with many difficult experiences, it can help to **reduce overwhelming input** and **use regulation strategies**.

Whatever way you plan to travel, **have a plan**



Prepare before using unfamiliar modes of transportation to reduce stress

- Practice using the type of transportation during a low stress time
- See if someone else can come along the first time

Plan your route, knowing the way is important even if you aren't driving

- Have a map on hand, either on your phone or printed out
- **Know details ahead of time:** like bus stops, drop off spots, or parking

If you are going to a meeting or appointment, **have a contact number**. You may need directions when you arrive, or you may need to tell someone you are running late

Prepare for sensory needs, even unexpected ones.

Examples: Ear plugs for sound, masks for smells, sunglasses for bright spaces

Time

Prepare to leave earlier than you think you need to to, and avoid a rush

Plan to arrive 15 minutes early to prepare for delays or complications

If you arrive early, have a plan for where to wait

Examples: A safe space or public spot nearby, shelter from cold or weather

If your ride is late or delays happen,

- **Have a backup way to travel,**

Examples: ride share app, someone to pick you up in an emergency

- **Remember:** travel can be complicated by things outside of your control. Buses can be late, construction can be happening, Etc. It's not your fault.



Riding the bus

When it is available, public transportation can be a useful way to get around.

It can feel very overwhelming to begin using public transport, but with preparation and experience, it can become routine and less stressful experience.



Know your bus route and schedule ahead of time: look online, on an app, or pick up a physical bus schedule from the bus itself

Know where your bus stops are, and how to get to your destination from the nearest stop

Plan alternate routes or options if a bus doesn't arrive or is very late

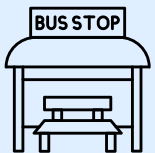
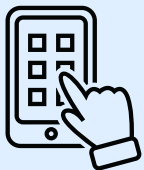
Know how and when to pay for your ride

Use apps to make the process easier

- In Pittsburgh, the **PRT app** allows you to track the bus, purchase tickets, find routes/alternative routes.
- Many bus routes have similar services

On the bus

- Know when to pull the cord to show that you need to get off at the next stop.
- Sit close to the one of the exits, often the front of the bus
- Be prepared for the bus to be crowded depending on time of day



Using **Ride Shares**



Know your options and how they work: common options include Lyft or Uber, but explore what other services might be available

Explore these apps before you need them

- You will enter your destination in the app,
- Choose details, like the type of car you need
- Arrange where the driver will pick you up



Trips can be scheduled in advance, even weeks beforehand

You will be given an estimate of travel time and cost when you schedule, but **these can change** during your trip



If a driver is having a hard time finding you, give them details to help them find you.

Examples: Details about your location (such as an intersection or building near you), **details about you** (the clothes you are wearing).

Make sure you have all of your things before you leave the car

Be safe!



Let others know where you are going, ride sharing apps include “real-time” and safety features

Before getting in a car

- **Check the license plate** and make sure it matches what is in the app
- **Ask “Who are you here to pick up?”** and wait for the driver to say your name before you share it with them



Driving

Driving can involve intense sensory experiences, unpredictable situations, and social interactions that may make it especially difficult for those with autism. *There should be no shame in not having access to a vehicle or being unable to drive.*

Learning to Drive

Learning to drive can be scary, and can come with social pressure as well. Still, if you are in a situation where driving is an option, it may be more possible for you than you expect. It's worth a try.



Take your time and give yourself space. Try out driving in safe places, like parking lots, before you feel pressured onto the road

If you need more time to learn than others expect, remember that it is more important to be safe!

Everyday Driving



Many navigation apps give you the option to **avoid toll roads and highways** if they are stressful

Prepare before you leave “park”

- **Know where you are going.** Have navigation ready or a route planned.
- **Set up your phone to be hands-free.** Prepare things like music apps, messaging, or navigation. It is also helpful to set up voice commands (Siri, Hey Google, or Alexa)
- **Check your dash for any issues,** check engine lights, gas levels, etc.
- **Make sure your sensory items are on hand,** like sunglasses

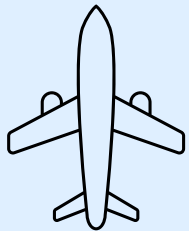
Think about parking before you go. You can check the location Google Maps, or call your destination to ask about parking options. *In Pittsburgh, the GO mobile app can help you find parking.*

Flying

Flying can be confusing, especially if you have not done it before. Airports, security, packing, and the flight itself can all involve unexpected steps.

Know what to expect and prepare for all the different aspects of your trip, including packing, the airport, security, and the flight itself, to make things easier.

Preparing before you go



These websites can help you prepare in advance of your trip, or even ask questions that may come to mind.

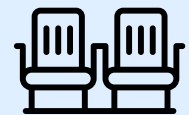
- **TSA.gov** includes rules and lists of what you can bring
- The **TSA Instagram** ([Instagram.com/TSA](https://www.instagram.com/TSA)) is responsive and can direct message them on Instagram to ask if things are ok to bring.



Sensory experiences on planes can be intense and inescapable. It is important to be prepared for these.

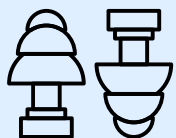
Examples include...

- Cabin pressurization can cause ear pain
- Nausea is a common experience
- Loud engine noise and noisy passengers are common
- Due to seating, you may be in physical contact with others, or in a tight space



Prepare your sensory items and keep them on hand

- Earplugs and headphones with noise
- Chewing gum can help with ear pressure
- Wear comfortable clothing and consider items like neck pillows
- If you get nauseous, take medication in advance
- Bring stim items, but try to be mindful of other passengers and choose items that don't make sound or require large movements



Baggage & Packing

Check baggage restrictions in advance, as these vary per airline.

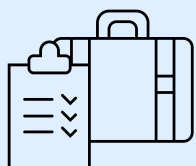


- These include bag weight limits. **You can weigh your bags in advance**
- “There may also be limits on item size or type, such as liquid limits or battery restrictions.



Use the airline app and check in for both yourself and baggage

Baggage Packing Tips



- **Go through a day of your normal life**, thinking about what items you use so you make sure to pack everything that you need.
- **Think about different places you might go on vacation** and items specific to those places. *For example, at the beach you'd need sunscreen, bathing suits, sunglasses, hats, swim shirts, flip-flops, etc.*

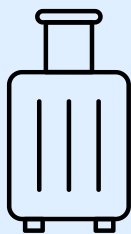
Remember that if you don't use it normally, you probably won't use it on vacation (you probably don't need three pairs of shoes if at home you only wear one).

Pack larger items first.

- Clothes can be rolled up and placed in the gaps.
- Socks can be placed inside of shoes.
- Remember there are outer suitcase pockets too.



Carry-on Luggage



Check carry-on restrictions in advance, like size, as these also vary per airline.

When packing, think about all of the things you'd need on the plane.

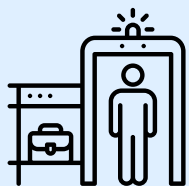
- Masks, sanitizer, or disinfecting wipes
- Sensory items like headphones, ear plugs, or sunglasses
- Jackets, carry-on pillows, or blankets
- Food (be aware of limits)
- Medications you may need during the flight
- Items like blankets, sweatshirt, or purses need to be put inside your primary bag

Tip: **gum can help reduce pressure changes in ears**

Sometimes your carry-on may be gate-checked. You may pick it up at the plane exit or at baggage claim.



The airport and Security



Ask about disability accommodations.

- Some airports (including Pittsburgh) have **a sensory room** that may make it easier to cope with the busy airport environment
- Mobility services can be available if you need them

Security and TSA

- This process is **unpredictable on purpose** – it changes over time
- You may go **through a scanner** or **pat-down**
- You can get randomly selected for screening and **you didn't do anything wrong**

