

Traveling With Disabilities: **A Guide for Brain Injury & Invisible Disability Travelers** *A resource for individuals with TBI, PTSD and other hidden disabilities*

1. Airline Accommodations (Air Carrier Access Act – Applies to ALL U.S. Airlines)

Under the ACAA, you have the right to accommodations without medical documentation.

****DPNA Code:** Alerts staff that you may need clearer instructions, extra time, reduced sensory input, or assistance navigating the airport or boarding.

You can request:

- Preboarding
- Clear communication
- Help stowing luggage
- Extra time
- ****Seating accommodations (bulkhead, front of cabin, near restroom, low-traffic areas)**



2. TSA Notification Card

What it is: An official federal government document. *Every single TSA officer in the United States* is strictly trained to recognize it, regardless of the airport.

Where it's recognized:

- *All US Airports*
- **How to get one:**
- No documentation required
- Download and complete online before travel.

https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/disability_notification_card_508.pdf

Why it helps: It reduces the pressure to explain your disability repeatedly and helps staff recognize when you need space, time, or assistance.



3. TSA Cares & Passenger Support Specialists (All U.S. Airports)

TSA Cares Helpline: (855) 787-2227 — Call at least 72 hours before travel.

Online <https://www.tsa.gov/contact-center/form/cares>

What they can do:

- Arrange a Passenger Support Specialist (PSS)
- Provide step-by-step guidance
- Assist with communication
- Reduce stress during screening

You can request a Passenger Support Specialist (PSS) to guide you through the screening process to reduce stress.



4. Sensory Rooms, Quiet Spaces & Low-Stimulation Areas

Most airports now offer calm zones specifically designed for travelers with TBI, PTSD, severe anxiety, or sensory processing challenges.

Common features:

- Low lighting
- Headphones
- Sound dampening
- Soft seating
- Space to decompress
- Sometimes weighted blankets or sensory tools

Tip: *Before you head to the terminal, search the official website of your specific airport to locate their Sensory Rooms, Quiet Spaces & Low-Stimulation Areas.* Knowing exactly where these zones are ahead of time ensures you have a designated, quiet escape ready the moment you pass through security.

5. Gate Passes for Support Persons

A family member or support person can request a Gate Pass at the airline check-in counter. They go through security with you and stay until boarding. Commonly approved for disability-related needs.

 **6. Mobility & Cognitive Assistance:** Wheelchairs for long terminals, fatigue, balance issues, cognitive overload, post-TBI dizziness.

Medical Liquids & Supplies: TSA allows:

- Liquid medications over 3.4 oz
- Cooling packs
- Gel-based items
- Assistive devices

7. Tips for Travelers with TBI, PTSD or other hidden disabilities

Before the airport:

- Add DPNA
- Call TSA Cares
- Obtain TSA Notification Card
- Pack headphones
- Bring sunglasses
- Bring sensory kit
- Print itinerary

At the airport:

- Go straight to your airlines "Special Services" counter
- Use Wheelchair Assistance
- Wear headphones & sunglasses if needed
- Use sensory/quiet rooms

On the plane:

- Ask for clear instructions
- Request help with bags
- Use earplugs or headphones
- Take your time deplaning

8. Why This Matters

These accommodations exist to reduce cognitive load, prevent overwhelm, and support safe, accessible travel for people with brain injuries and invisible disabilities.

****Tip: Book your flight first.** Do not pay for upgraded seating. Once you have your "Flight Confirmation" phone your Air Carriers dedicated Accessibility line and Request the Accessibility Code be added to your reservation. You can say something like this:

"Please add the **DPNA code** to my reservation. I have an invisible disability that requires extra communication and assistance from the crew."

This is the time to ask for seating accommodations (bulkhead, front of cabin, window, near restroom, low-traffic areas) ***without charging you additional fees/money!***