

# MS vs. Airport Assistance



**After our last holiday to Nashville, Tennessee, I had to do something about how I navigate the airport. I could not be ill on this holiday. Not like last time.**

I had never heard of “airport assistance” until I came across it on an MS group on social media.

It sounded helpful, but all I could think about was the amount of questions I’d have to answer. I don’t know about you, but I make a conscious effort to try and forget about my disability.

The weakness, the fogginess, the neuro pain, the fatigue (oh wow that fatigue!)—to me, all that is just... normal. Requesting something like airport assistance felt like I was just putting a spotlight on the fact that I was actually not normal.

Turns out though the only questions I was asked was whether I could climb the planes stairs (I was shown a picture of the steps to the plane) and whether I needed a wheelchair.

I don’t know what I imagined exactly, but I thought there’d be some sort of cool little buggy they’d come and pick you up in or something. No?

No, on this occasion, I was offered a wheelchair. I think my words were, “Seriously?!”

I’d never been in a wheelchair before—I freaked out so badly.

I took note of people’s looks around me. I could imagine them saying, “oh, she looks so young, must be awful to be disabled so young,” or “she doesn’t look disabled, she doesn’t a chair.” Truthfully, I felt like a fraud.

I made every effort to hold back my tears of insecurity and hatred of myself and my disability as I was pushed through the airport.

I felt so judged. There were hundreds of people in this airport, and I felt like they were all looking straight at me.

Why did this feel like such a big deal to me? Because my “disability” is now on show for all to see. Like being naked in public. It was the only thing that had ever made my invisible illness visible. It was scary. In some ways it was like being diagnosed all over again, but this time, people saw what they didn’t see before. They saw a visual representation of MS. My MS.

I think it even shocked my husband, as even he’d not seen me like that before. I guess I cover a lot of it up.

Thing is, I didn’t know anyone in this airport. I’ll never see them again, they don’t know me, they don’t know what I’ve been through. Why do I care so much if they judged me?

There was also something else that I realized. I realized that I can’t change my physical state, but I can change my mental state. I was allowing myself to feel like this.

I began to think about the wheelchair like a lift or an escalator. A transportation system to get my body from point A to point B. Once you get passed the weird feeling of people looking at you, it feels like the ultimate VIP experience not many other people get.

Yeah you may get judged a little, maybe some snide remarks here and there, but do you know what? I was treated so well by the airport staff. I did not feel humiliated, ashamed or put down. They understood completely. **Not one person asked me what my disability was.** I didn’t have to stand in queues—like at all—I was always first on the plane and I had a helper lady that checked my tickets, personally took me through customs and to the gate I needed, and came to fetch me when I needed to board.

I’m never ever going to catch a plane again without assistance. I had the best holiday of my life and my energy lasted **all 4 days**.

**Do you use airport assistance? How has your experience been?**