# Airlines reconsider policies to accommodate plus-sized passengers amid rising obesity rates



The rising prevalence of obesity and overweight individuals in the UK is prompting airlines to reconsider their policies for accommodating plus-sized passengers. Statistics from the NHS show that the percentage of obese adults in the UK has nearly doubled over a quarter-century, rising from 15 per cent in 1997 to 29 per cent in 2022. Additionally, 64 per cent of adults were categorised as overweight in 2022. This trend has led to growing pressure on airlines to adjust their approaches to seating arrangements and ticketing for larger customers.

Major airlines currently adopt a largely uniform approach to passenger seating, which is under scrutiny due to its practical challenges and sensitivity. Plus-sized passengers often face the requirement to purchase an additional seat to ensure comfort and safety. While some travellers view this policy as discriminatory, other passengers express concerns about their own comfort when seated adjacent to larger individuals.

A recent viral image, initially shared by consumer advocate Christopher Elliott and later reposted by the hip-hop group Pretty Ricky, highlighted the difficulty some passengers experience in fitting comfortably into their seats. This sparked widespread discussion about how airlines manage seating for larger passengers. Pretty Ricky commented on the situation, stating: "Airlines will have to have something in place for plus-sized passengers. This image was taken recently in a flight showing how difficult it is for people who are bigger than one seat. It's also difficult for those sitting next to them. It's a difficult situation because the airline will need to think of a happy medium."

Different airlines have adopted various strategies to accommodate the needs of plus-sized travellers:

**British Airways** takes a case-by-case approach, providing seat belt extenders but insisting that passengers who cannot fully lower both armrests must purchase an extra seat. Their website notes that an additional seat does not always guarantee more width. First and business class seats offer more space but have fixed armrests, limiting flexibility for wider passengers. British Airways has also increased the number of seats per row on some aircraft, such as fitting ten seats per row on Boeing 777s where there were previously nine.

**Air France** offers a discount of 25 per cent on a second adjacent economy seat if a passenger cannot fit comfortably in one seat. Should unoccupied seats remain available in the cabin, the cost of the second seat is refunded. However, passengers who have not booked a second seat may be denied boarding for security reasons if the flight is full or if single-seat seating is unavailable. Passengers must contact Air France directly to arrange this, as online booking for two seats under the same passenger is not supported. Premium economy and business class cabins do not allow for an extra seat with belt extension due to fixed armrests.

**Virgin Atlantic** encourages overweight passengers to book additional seats without charging extra passenger taxes, fees, or surcharges on the extra seat. The airline offers various seat options with increasing legroom and wider seats, particularly in Upper Class where seat width reaches 22 inches. Seat belt extenders are provided upon request according to safety regulations.

**Ryanair** requires customers to purchase two adjacent seats if they need extra space, with a booking procedure involving naming the second seat as "Extra Comfort Seat" under the same travel document. Passengers receive two boarding passes and the second indicates the extra seat.

**easyJet** also urges larger passengers to buy an additional seat and provides seat belt extensions when necessary. However, extenders must be requested onboard, which might be uncomfortable for some passengers. Their standard seat width is 16 inches with a pitch of 28 inches. Extra legroom seats are available for purchase.

**Emirates** maintains a policy that customers unable to be safely seated and belted must pre-purchase an adjacent seat or upgrade to premium economy or business class, if possible. Passengers failing to do so may be rebooked or advised to defer travel if accommodation is unavailable on the intended flight.

The general consensus across these airlines is that accommodating plus-sized passengers often entails purchasing additional seats or upgrading to higher classes, typically at increased costs. These measures aim to balance passenger safety and comfort while addressing limited cabin space.

The debate continues as airlines face the challenge of providing equitable solutions for all passengers within the constraints of aircraft design and safety regulations. The conversation was recently amplified following the viral photo of a passenger struggling to fit into his seat, illustrating the complexities of the issue from both passenger and airline perspectives.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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