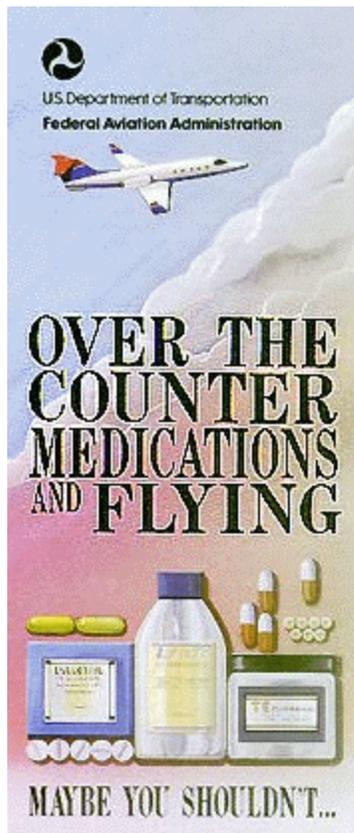




**FAA OFFICE OF AVIATION MEDICINE
CIVIL AEROMEDICAL INSTITUTE
PUBLICATIONS
OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICATIONS**



A commonly held belief is that medicine cures all that ails.

Whether medicine is prescribed by a doctor or is an over-the-counter medication that you have selected, as a pilot you must consider the effect it will have on your performance.

When you are given a prescription, your doctor explains the possible side-effects of the medication you are about to take. Your pharmacist also outlines them when filling the prescription.

However, when you treat yourself with a non-prescription medication, you become your own doctor and pharmacist. Therefore, you must inform yourself of the possible adverse reactions that you might encounter. The following will help you understand some of the basics that you will need to successfully accomplish this task.

OTCs Defined

Over-the-counter medications (OTCs) are any legal, non-prescription substance taken for the relief of discomforting symptoms. This may include capsules, tablets, powders, or liquids.

Underlying Medical Condition

When you are not feeling well, your best action is to ground yourself and wait until you have recovered before resuming your pilot duties. There may be times, however, when you feel that you must fly and will be tempted to doctor yourself with OTCs. At these times it is good to remember that the OTCs only hide your symptoms for a while. They do not usually "cure" the condition, and you will not be at peak physical performance while you fly.

Problems With Medications

There are two main areas of concern about unwanted reactions to medications.

Possible allergy.

Allergy is a rare and unpredictable reaction to a substance. If you know that you are allergic to something, you should carefully read the list of ingredients of any OTC to assure that none of the substance is included in its formulation.

Possible unexpected side-effects.

These can take many forms, including drowsiness, impairment of judgment, upset stomach or bowels, disturbance of vision, or even itching. Any of these could cause an impairment that might lead to incapacitation while flying.

Decongestants and caffeine (contained in coffee, tea, cola, chocolate) are both strong stimulants in some individuals. Mixed together, they can make you "hyperactive." Note also that some cough syrups contain a decongestant.

Summary Advice

- READ and follow label directions for use of medication.
- If the label warns of side-effects, do not fly until twice the recommended dosing interval has passed. So, if the label says "take every 4-6 hours," then wait at least 12 hours to fly.
- Remember, the condition you are treating may be as disqualifying as the medication.
- When in doubt, ask your physician or Aviation Medical Examiner for advice.
- As a pilot, you are responsible for your own personal "pre-flight." Be wary of any illness that requires medicine to make you feel better.
- If an illness is serious enough to require medication, it is also serious enough to prevent you from flying.
- Do not fly if you have a cold - changes in atmospheric pressures with changes in altitude could cause serious ear and sinus problems.
- Avoid mixing decongestants and caffeine.
- Beware of medications that use alcohol as a base for the ingredients.

	Medications	Side-Effects	Interactions
PAIN RELIEF/ FEVER	ASPIRIN Alka-Seltzer Bayer Aspirin	Ringing in ears, nausea, stomach ulceration, hyperventillation	Increase effect of blood thinners
	ACETAMINOPHEN Tylenol	Liver toxicity (in large doses)	
	IBUPROFEN Advil Motrin Nuprin	Upset stomach; dizziness, rash, itching	Increase effect of blood thinners
COLDS/ FLU	ANTIHISTAMINES Actifed Dristan Benadryl Dixoral Cheracol-Plus Nyquil Chlortrimeton Sinarest Contac Sinutab Dimetapp	Sedation, dizziness, rash, impairment of coordination, upset stomach, thickening of bronchial secretions, blurring of vision	Increase sedative effects of other medications
	DECONGESTANTS Afrin Nasal Spray Sine-Aid Sudafed	Excessive stimulation dizziness, difficulty with	Aggravate high blood pressure, heart disease, and prostate

		urination, palpitations	problems
	COUGH SUPPRESSANTS Benylin Robitussin CF/DM Vicks Formula 44	Drowsiness, blurred vision, difficulty with urination, upset stomach	Increase sedative effects of other medications
BOWEL PREPARATIONS	LAXATIVES Correctol Ex-Lax	Unexpected bowel activity at altitude, rectal itching	
	ANTI-DIARRHEALS Imodium A-D Pepto-Bismol	Drowsiness, depression, blurred vision (See Aspirin)	
APPETITE SUPPRESSANTS	Acutrim Dexatrim	Excessive stimulation, dizziness, palpitations, headaches	Increased stimulatory effects of decongestants. Interfere with high blood pressure medications
SLEEPING AIDS	Nytol Somined	(Contain antihistamine) Prolonged drowsiness, blurred vision	Cause excessive drowsiness when used with alcohol
STIMULANTS	CAFFEINE Coffee, tea, cola, chocolate	Excessive stimulation, tremors, palpitations, headache	Interfere with high blood pressure medications.

This table lists the common OTCs and outlines some of their possible side-effects that could affect your flying abilities. As with all drugs, side-effects may vary with the individual and with changes in altitude and other flight conditions.

MEDICAL FACTS FOR PILOTS

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