

Over-the-Counter Medications *and* **Flying:**

Maybe You Shouldn't . . .

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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 (OTC) 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 nonprescription 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 are any legal, nonprescription substance taken for the relief of discomforting symptoms. This substance may be in the form of capsules, tablets, powders, or liquids.

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



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usually “cure” the condition, and you will not be at peak physical performance while you fly.

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

- 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 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.

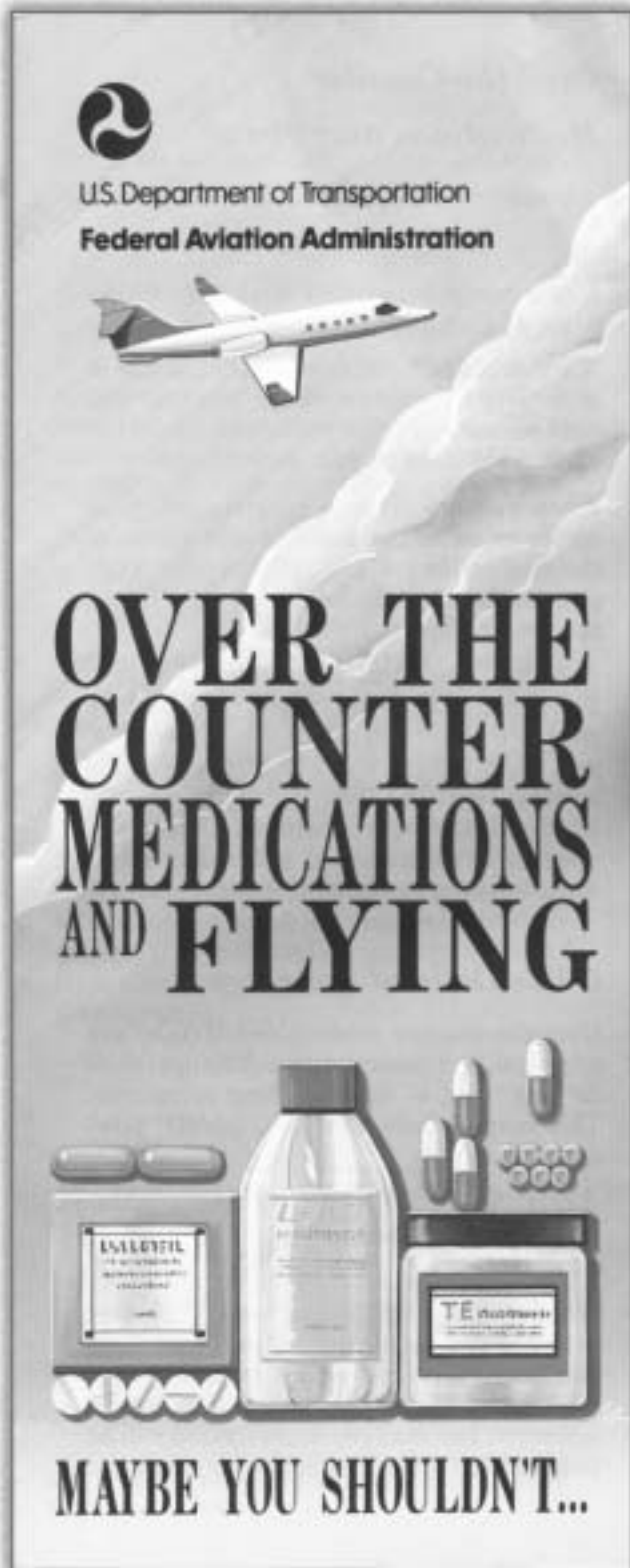
SUMMARY ADVICE

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 that the condition you are treating may be as disqualifying as the medication.

When in doubt, ask your physician or Aviation Medical Examiner for advice.



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration

OVER THE
COUNTER
MEDICATIONS
AND FLYING

MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T...

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.

The above article can be found at <http://www.cami.jccbi.gov/AAM-400A/400aotc.html>. At this site you will also find a list of common OTCs listing the type/name of the medication, side-effects of the medication, and interactions the OTC may have with other medications. We have not included the current chart due to the fact that the FAA will be revising the medications brochure to include information about newer pharmaceutical products. They plan to publish a new brochure later this year. You can view this revised chart at the above website as well.



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