



# USHST

United States Helicopter Safety Team  
Our Vision: A Civil Helicopter Community With Zero Accidents



## Over The Counter Medication

### *Is it safe to fly after taking nonprescription medications?*



#### Should You Fly?

Do you fully understand the impact that some nonprescription medications, also known as over-the-counter (OTC) medications, have on your flying abilities?



#### Can OTC Medications Affect Your Judgement?

Did you know that some OTC medications may hinder a pilot's ability to control the aircraft

and/or adversely affect his or her judgment and decision-making abilities?

The FAA recommends pilots **not fly** while taking certain non-prescription medications that cause drowsiness or sedation, such as certain antihistamines and sleep aids.

#### “Impairment Unaware”?

Certain OTC medications impair mental functions and seriously degrade a pilot's performance.

This impairment may occur **even when the individual feels alert and is apparently functioning normally** - in other words, the pilot may be "impairment unaware."

In 2013, representatives from the aviation industry and FAA issued a letter to pilots warning about medication use and flying.



According to the joint industry and FAA analysis, medications prohibited by the FAA caused or contributed to 12% of fatal general aviation accidents. A 2009-2014 USHST dataset of the fatal accidents analyzed also came up with similar numbers for the presence of OTC medications.



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## Know the Effects

Read the medication label before you medicate and fly. Some medications carry very specific warnings against operating machinery, motor vehicles, or performing tasks requiring alertness. This includes flying, even in a glider or hot-air balloon.

Combinations of prescription and OTC medications can be particularly dangerous. Ask a pharmacist about adverse effects associated with medication combinations.

Be aware that the effects of antihistamines and sleep aids may persist for several days.

## Wait 5X The Dosage Interval!

For safety, pilots **should not fly** following the last dose of any sedating OTC medications until five times the dosage interval has passed.<sup>1</sup>:

For example, at least a 30-hour wait time is recommended for a sedating OTC medication that is taken every 4 to 6 hours (5 x 6).



## I'M SAFE

In between doctor visits, self-assess your condition before each flight and ground yourself when you're not fit to fly. The **IMSAFE** checklist is an excellent tool.



✓ **I'M SAFE CHECKLIST**

- I**llness—Do I have any symptoms?
- M**edication—Have I been taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs?
- S**tress—Am I under psychological pressure from the job? Worried about financial matters, health problems, or family discord?
- A**lcohol—Have I been drinking within 8 hours? Within 24 hours?
- F**atigue—Am I tired and not adequately rested?
- E**motion—Am I emotionally upset?

*This document is a peer reviewed publication by an expert panel of the USHST Implementation Team. More information about the USHST, its reports, its safety tools, and presentations can be obtained at its web site: ([www.IHST.org](http://www.IHST.org)) or at ([www.USHST.org](http://www.USHST.org)).*



<sup>1</sup> 5-times the maximum pharmacologic half-life of the medication, if available, or 5-times the maximum hourly dosage interval if the pharmacological half-life is not available.