

# Illness & Medication



**what pilots  
and doctors  
need to know**



EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF AEROSPACE MEDICINE

# Illness & Medication

## what pilots and doctors need to know

**Any medication can cause side effects, some of which may impair the flying performance of pilots.**

Equally, symptoms of colds, sore throats, abdominal upsets, or painful ailments may distract pilots and degrade their performance whilst on duty. The symptoms may be compounded by the side effects of the medication prescribed or bought over the counter and this combination may be degrading a pilot's performance and lead to incapacitation.

All lists of aeromedical 'approved' drugs will be inevitably incomplete and out of date at the day they are published. Therefore, this leaflet describes some basic principles that may enable pilots and their treating doctors to assist each other in preventing the use of medication that may degrade flying performance and impact flight safety.



## what the **PILOT** needs to know

Have a critical attitude to any kind of medication, whether prescribed, or bought without prescription. Be cautious about purchasing any medication via the Internet which is well known for impure and dubious substances.

Tell any doctor you consult that you are a pilot. Describe your job and explain why optimal physical and mental fitness is paramount for the safe performance of your flying duties.

Ask your doctor about the effects of your illness and medication on your professional performance, fitness to fly, and incapacitation risk.

Inform your treating doctor to call your aeromedical examiner (AME) when she/he is uncertain about the effects of the medication on your fitness to fly.

If you have any questions about medication or health conditions regarding flight safety in the period between your flight medicals: **CALL YOUR AME.** An AME knows the legal requirements and has the aeromedical knowledge to help you and your doctor to find the best solution.

During your flight medical examination, report to your AME any illness and/or medication, including prescribed medication, self-medication, and herbal treatments.





# what the **DOCTOR** needs to know

**You need to know that your patient is a pilot.  
Ask the pilot details about the working conditions  
of the job:**

what are the physical and mental capacities needed, workload/fatigue, and circadian aspects (e.g. night flying, early starts, time-zone crossing).

**Consider the effects of the illness and medication on  
the flying performance of your patient.**

**A pilot is fit to fly if:**

- 1) he/she can execute all functions on board even in difficult operational circumstances;

- 2) there is no significant risk of sudden/subtle incapacitation; and
- 3) the flying activity is not expected to worsen his/her health condition.

Consider that initial treatment on a new medication or change of dose on an established medication may need grounding of the pilot.

**Medication disqualifying for flying duties has at least one of the following direct or indirect effects:**

- impairment of Central Nervous System functions
- impairment of cognitive/psychomotor performance, alertness, consciousness
- impairment of cardiovascular and respiratory system functions
- impairment of sensory functions (vision, auditory functions, vestibular function)

If in doubt about the effects of illness and/or medication on pilot's fitness to fly or whether or not the pilot has to be grounded: consult your patient's aeromedical examiner (AME), who knows all (legal) medical requirements and can help you to find the best solution.

**More detailed information can be found in** "Guidance material for the assessment of medication of pilots and ATCOs" on:

[www.esam.aero](http://www.esam.aero)

