



# Flight After Use of Medications with Sedating Effects

To cope with sneezing and congestion, many allergy sufferers turn to over-the-counter (OTC) medications and other common allergy remedies. Though effective, these medications are not without side effects. In fact, the active ingredient in most of these medications is the same: Diphenhydramine. Diphenhydramine is great for treating allergies, colds, coughs, and even motion sickness. But it also has a function that can be especially troubling for those of us in aviation: it acts as a sedative. Side effects of diphenhydramine can include dry mouth, nose, and throat; drowsiness; dizziness; nausea; vomiting; loss of appetite; headache; muscle weakness; and nervousness. While it's unlikely you will experience all of these side effects, even one or two can have a negative effect on your ability to fly safely.

Another problem with diphenhydramine and other similar drugs is that some people who take it often subjectively report that they feel "perfectly fine." However, performance tests show that these same people were just as incapacitated as others who were legally intoxicated from alcohol.

So if you find yourself in a situation where you feel the need to take an allergy or cold medication, consider whether you should be flying at all. It is your responsibility as pilot in command to ensure that you meet all applicable medical standards before any flight. No one expects you to be as skilled as an aviation medical examiner in determining your exact medical status, but you know your body. Just as with any flight, the FAA expects you to be honest with yourself when it comes to assessing whether you are fit to operate an aircraft as pilot in command. Using the personal readiness **IM SAFE** checklist prior to every flight is a good way to ensure that you are physically and mentally safe to fly, not being impaired by – **I**llness, **M**edication, **S**tress, **A**lcohol, **F**atigue, or **E**motion.

### Pilot Tip:

If you do use a medication with sedating effects, and your symptoms have been resolved, do not fly until at least 5 maximal dosing intervals have passed. For example, if the directions say to take a medication every 4 to 6 hours, wait until at least 30 hours (5 x 6 hours) after the last dose before piloting an aircraft.

### References and Additional Reading:

- FAA Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM) – Chapter 8. Medical Facts for Pilots, Section 1. Fitness for flight [www.faa.gov/air\\_traffic/publications/ATpubs/AIM/aim.pdf](http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/ATpubs/AIM/aim.pdf)
- Medications and Flying Brochure - FAA Publication OK05-0005 (rev.6/10) [www.faa.gov/pilots/safety/pilotsafetybrochures/media/Meds\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.faa.gov/pilots/safety/pilotsafetybrochures/media/Meds_brochure.pdf)
- "Sneezes and Zzzzs" - Aeromedical Advisory – FAA Safety Briefing, March/April 2012 [www.faa.gov/news/safety\\_briefing/2012/media/MarApr2012.pdf](http://www.faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2012/media/MarApr2012.pdf)

