



# ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE IN AVIATION

## ALCOHOL

**What is alcohol?** The term 'alcohol' describes a series of organic chemical compounds, but only one type — ethyl alcohol or ethanol — is found in drinks intended for human consumption.

### Alcohol and safety

Alcohol is a depressant drug, even though it may feel stimulating at first. Within minutes of drinking, some alcohol will be absorbed into the bloodstream. The rate of absorption can be affected by certain things, for instance eating food while drinking slows down absorption. Even a small amount of alcohol affects decision-making skills.

Alcohol also slows down reaction time. This means that driving, using machinery or undertaking activities such as swimming, even after a small amount of alcohol, is dangerous. Females have less water in their bodies, so do not dilute alcohol as easily as males. This is one of the reasons women feel the effects of alcohol more quickly than men.

Mixing alcohol with other drugs, whether illicit, prescribed or over the counter, can be dangerous and the results unpredictable. Your pharmacist or doctor is in the best position to offer sound and knowledgeable advice on how different drugs interact with each other and how this might impact on your health and capacity to undertake different tasks.

### Long-term and short-term effects of alcohol

Drinking alcohol has health, social and economic costs and benefits for both the individual and general population. People who drink small quantities of alcohol have better health outcomes than those who do not drink, although abstainers achieve much better health outcomes than heavy drinkers. It does not follow, however, that abstainers, either at the individual or population level, would achieve a better health outcome by drinking; there are many valid, and often compelling, health and social reasons why people choose not to drink.

At high levels of consumption, costs far outweigh benefits, and the higher the consumption, the greater the costs to individual health and society.

The short-term effects of alcohol consumption may include:

- a feeling of relaxation
- a reduced concentration
- a slowed reflexes
- a fewer inhibitions
- increased confidence
- reduced coordination
- slurred speech
- more intense moods (e.g. feeling more sad, happy or angry)
- confusion
- blurred vision
- poor muscle control
- nausea and vomiting
- drowsiness
- coma, and
- death.

The long-term effects of alcohol consumption may include:

- malnutrition
- depression and anxiety
- cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, lips and liver
- brain injury, loss of memory, confusion and hallucinations
- high blood pressure, irregular pulse and enlarged heart
- weakness and loss of muscle tissue
- sweating, flushing and bruising of the skin
- inflamed stomach lining and ulcers
- increased risk of lung infections
- severe swelling of the liver, hepatitis and cirrhosis
- inflamed pancreas
- tingling and loss of sensation in the hands and feet
- impotence, shrinking of the testicles and damaged/reduced sperm, and
- increased risk of gynaecological problems.

## Aviation workplace requirements

In accordance with Civil Aviation Safety Regulation Part 99, personnel who perform, or are available to perform, safety-sensitive aviation activities are subject to random alcohol and other drug (AOD) testing.

For alcohol, the permitted level is a concentration of less than 0.02 gms of alcohol in 100 mls of blood (or a concentration of less than 0.02 gms of alcohol in 210 litres of breath).

The aim of the testing program is preventative, not punitive. However, the regulations provide for a suitable enforcement regime to deal with personnel whose tests return confirmed readings over the permitted levels for drugs or alcohol.

## Community support services

### Alcohol and Drug Information Service

Each state and territory has an AOD information telephone service. Many operate 24 hours a day and offer a free-call number for people living in regional areas.

**Australian Capital Territory**  
**24 Hour Alcohol and Drug Telephone Line**  
02 6207 9977

**New South Wales**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
02 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599 (rural)

**Northern Territory**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
1800 131 350

**Queensland**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
07 3236 2414 or 1800 177 833 (rural)

**South Australia**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
1300 13 13 40

**Tasmania**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
1800 811 994 (24 hour)

**Victoria**  
**DirectLine**  
1800 888 236  
**DrugInfo**  
1300 85 85 84  
**Family Drug Helpline**  
1300 660 068  
**Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS Line)**  
03 9418 1020 or 1800 014 446 (rural)

**Western Australia**  
**Alcohol and Drug Information Service**  
08 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (rural)  
**Parent Drug Information Service**  
08 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (rural)

**CASA contacts**  
CASA has established a virtual resource centre on AOD in the Australian aviation sector, providing comprehensive policy and program advice, resources for education and training purposes, self-assessment tools, links to useful documents and services, and a range of other materials. The website can be found at [www.casa.gov.au/aod](http://www.casa.gov.au/aod).

**CASA AOD Program Manager**  
The Program Manager for the CASA AOD initiative can be contacted at [aod@casa.gov.au](mailto:aod@casa.gov.au).