



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE IN AVIATION

OVER-THE-COUNTER SUBSTANCES

Work safety and performance can be negatively affected by the use of over-the-counter medications due to the effect these substances have on the body, even when used as directed by a doctor or pharmacist.

Some over-the-counter preparations reduce alertness and can impair coordination and reaction time. Others, particularly cough and cold medications, can cause drowsiness or distort the user's sense of time and space. Generally, potential side effects of this nature are described in warnings printed on the packet. The effects of over-the-counter medications can become unpredictable when combined with alcohol.

Antihistamines

What are antihistamines?

Histamines are natural chemicals produced by the body in response to allergic reactions or injury. Antihistamines are drugs that are designed to block the effects of histamine release. They are used for the treatment of hay fever, runny nose, sneezing, insect bites and stings, nausea and vomiting, travel sickness and allergies. They may be used by illicit drug users when other drugs are not available or to block withdrawal symptoms.

Antihistamines and safety

Antihistamines may cause drowsiness and/or dizziness, which could potentially impact on safety. The effects of antihistamine use may impair the user's ability to react appropriately in safety-sensitive situations, and they may also fail to notice something that they would have noticed if not for the effect of the antihistamines.

Long-term and short-term effects of antihistamines

Even in low to moderate doses, antihistamine use may cause:

- drowsiness
- dizziness
- loss of concentration
- impaired motor coordination
- lassitude (weariness or disinterest in exerting oneself)
- sedation or insomnia
- mild euphoria
- blurred vision
- ringing in the ears
- tremors.

Users may report palpitations and headaches, and experience reduced blood pressure, heart rate and depression. There may be gastric discomfort, loss of appetite and a physical feeling of heaviness. High doses can be hallucinogenic.

When overdose occurs, a period of hyper-excitability, including delirium and convulsions, may occur. This may end in severe central nervous system depression and death from respiratory arrest and/or cardiovascular collapse. Prior to this, coma may occur. Generally, death results from a combination of antihistamines and other drugs.

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 testing. CASA does not test for the presence of over-the-counter substances, however the aviation workforce should nevertheless be mindful of the potential for these substances to have an impact on workplace safety.

Community support services

Alcohol and Drug Information Service

Each state and territory has an alcohol and other drug (AOD) information telephone service. Many operate 24 hours 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.

CASA AOD Program Manager
The Program Manager for the CASA AOD initiative can be contacted at aod@casa.gov.au.