



# ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE IN AVIATION

## PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

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

Some prescription 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 prescription medications can become unpredictable when combined with alcohol.

### Benzodiazepines

#### What are benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines are depressant drugs. Also known as 'minor tranquillisers', they are prescribed by doctors to relieve stress and anxiety and to help people sleep. Some people illegally use benzodiazepines to become intoxicated.

#### Benzodiazepines and safety

Like other depressants, benzodiazepines work by slowing down the activity of the central nervous system. In the short term, they can help with relaxation, calmness and relief from tension and anxiety, but they can have a range of unwanted side effects.

Benzodiazepines can cause drowsiness and fatigue, and slow reaction time. The use of benzodiazepines may result in blurred vision, lack of muscular coordination and slower information processing. Each of these effects has a potential impact on safety.

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

The unwanted negative effects of benzodiazepines vary according to dose. The short-term effects of low to moderate doses may include:

- mild impairment of thought processes, memory and coordination
- drowsiness, tiredness and lethargy
- dizziness
- vertigo
- blurred or double vision
- dry mouth
- slurred speech and stuttering
- tremors
- nausea and vomiting
- loss of appetite
- constipation or diarrhoea
- feelings of euphoria, isolation or emotional depression.

Higher doses may result in:

- drowsiness, over-sedation and sleep
- confusion
- slurred speech
- poor coordination
- impaired judgement
- difficulty thinking clearly
- loss of memory
- blurred or double vision and/or dizziness
- mood swings and aggressive outbursts.

Very high doses of benzodiazepines can cause respiratory depression, unconsciousness or coma. Death rarely occurs from overdose of benzodiazepines alone, but it can occur if large doses are combined with alcohol or other drugs. Death can also occur as a result of inhalation of mucus or vomit when a person is unconscious.

The use of benzodiazepines over a long period of time (more than two to three weeks) should be carefully monitored by your doctor. Some of the health effects of using high doses of benzodiazepines in the long term include:

- muscle weakness
- skin rashes
- weight gain
- increased risk of accidents
- increased risk of falling
- sexual problems
- menstrual irregularities
- memory loss
- confusion and difficulty thinking clearly
- lethargy and lack of motivation
- fatigue
- drowsiness
- difficulty sleeping and disturbing dreams
- nausea
- personality change and changes in emotional responses
- anxiety
- irritability, paranoia and aggression
- depression.

## 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. Testing may be conducted to detect the presence of benzodiazepines above the permitted level.

For testable drugs, the permitted level is a concentration of the testable drug in 100 mls of blood that is less than the confirmatory target concentration for that drug specified in Table 5.1 of the Australian Standard 4760-2006.

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 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).