

alcohol. Although the regulations are quite specific, it is a good idea to be more conservative than the regulations.

Drugs

Pilot performance can be seriously degraded by both prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as by the medical conditions for which they are taken. Many medications, such as tranquilizers, sedatives, strong pain relievers, and cough suppressants have primary effects that may impair judgment, memory, alertness, coordination, vision, and the ability to make calculations. Others, such as antihistamines, blood pressure drugs, muscle relaxants, and agents to control diarrhea and motion sickness have side effects that may impair the same critical functions. Any medication that depresses the nervous system, such as sedatives, tranquilizers, or antihistamines can make a pilot more susceptible to hypoxia.

Painkillers can be grouped into two broad categories: analgesics and anesthetics. Analgesics are drugs that reduce pain, while anesthetics are drugs that deaden pain or cause loss of consciousness.

Over-the-counter analgesics, such as acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin), acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol), and ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) have few side effects when taken in the correct dosage. Although some people are allergic to certain analgesics or may suffer from stomach irritation, flying usually is not restricted when taking these drugs. However, flying is almost always precluded while using prescription analgesics, such as drugs containing propoxyphene (e.g., Darvon), oxycodone (e.g., Percodan), meperidine (e.g., Demerol), and codeine since these drugs may cause side effects such as mental confusion, dizziness, headaches, nausea, and vision problems. Anesthetic drugs are commonly used for dental and surgical procedures. Most local anesthetics used for minor dental and outpatient procedures wear off within a relatively short period of time. The anesthetic itself may not limit flying so much as the actual procedure and subsequent pain.

Stimulants are drugs that excite the central nervous system and produce an increase in alertness and activity. Amphetamines, caffeine, and nicotine are all forms of stimulants. Common uses of these drugs include appetite suppression, fatigue reduction, and mood elevation. Some of these drugs may cause a stimulant reaction, even though this reaction is not their primary function. In some cases, stimulants can produce anxiety and mood swings, both of which are dangerous when flying.

Depressants are drugs that reduce the body's functioning in many areas. These drugs lower blood pressure, reduce mental processing, and slow motor and reaction responses. There are

several types of drugs that can cause a depressing effect on the body, including tranquilizers, motion sickness medication, and some types of stomach medication, decongestants, and antihistamines. The most common depressant is alcohol.

Some drugs, which can be classified as neither stimulants nor depressants, have adverse effects on flying. For example, some forms of antibiotics can produce dangerous side effects, such as balance disorders, hearing loss, nausea, and vomiting. While many antibiotics are safe for use while flying, the infection requiring the antibiotic may prohibit flying. In addition, unless specifically prescribed by a physician, do not take more than one drug at a time, and never mix drugs with alcohol because the effects are often unpredictable.

The dangers of illegal drugs also are well documented. Certain illegal drugs can have hallucinatory effects that occur days or weeks after the drug is taken. Obviously, these drugs have no place in the aviation community.

14 CFR part 65 prohibits pilots from performing crewmember duties while using any medication that affects the body in any way contrary to safety. The safest rule is not to fly as a crewmember while taking any medication, unless approved to do so by the FAA. If there is any doubt regarding the effects of any medication, consult an AME before flying.

Scuba Diving

Scuba diving subjects the body to increased pressure, which allows more nitrogen to dissolve in body tissues and fluids. The reduction of atmospheric pressure that accompanies flying can produce physical problems for scuba divers. Reducing the pressure too quickly allows small bubbles of nitrogen to form inside the body as the gas comes out of solution. These bubbles can cause a painful and potentially incapacitating condition called "the bends." (An example is dissolved gas forming bubbles as pressure decreases by slowly opening a transparent bottle of carbonated beverage.) Scuba training emphasizes how to prevent the bends when rising to the surface, but increased nitrogen concentrations can remain in tissue fluids for several hours after a diver leaves the water. The bends can be experienced from as low as 8,000 feet MSL, with increasing severity as altitude increases. As noted in the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), the minimum recommended time between scuba diving on nondecompression stop dives and flying is 12 hours, while the minimum time recommended between decompression stop diving and flying is 24 hours. [Figure 9-5]