

OVER-THE-COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATIONS REFERENCE GUIDE

What OTC Medications Can I Take and Still Be Safe to Fly?

(Updated 08-28-2024)

1. First, ask yourself “Do I have an underlying condition that makes me unsafe to fly?”

Title 14 CFR 61.53 is the regulation, which prohibits flight with a known medical deficiency (unless cleared by the FAA) and requires that you determine that you are fit to fly prior to each flight.

- ☐ Am I sick?
 - Am I having trouble clearing my ears at ground level?
 - Do I feel bad enough that I keep thinking about how I feel?
 - Are others asking me if I am ok?
 - Do I feel good enough to fly ONLY if I take medication?
 - Am I getting worse?

2. Next, consider these issues before operating an aircraft:

- ☐ In the last few days, have you taken, or do you plan to take any medications before flying?
- ☐ If currently taking a medication only for symptom relief, would you be safe to fly without it?
- ☐ Do you have any other underlying health conditions?
 - Discuss these conditions with your AME or family physician to determine if you are safe to fly.
 - Specifically ask about your ability “to operate machinery” (including any aircraft).
 - Discuss if the medication, OTC or otherwise, will pose a problem with the underlying condition or other health conditions and/or other medications that you are taking.

3. When choosing an OTC Medication, follow these steps:

When choosing an OTC medication:

#1. IDENTIFY the active ingredient(s).
Verify you have taken this medication in the past with no side effects.

Note: Single ingredient products are preferred over combination products (because it is easier to spot disqualifying ingredients).

#2. READ the label.
If there is a warning that it “May cause drowsiness” or if it advises the user to “be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery,” then this medication is NOT safe for flying.

#3. READ carefully.
If this is the first time you are taking a new medication, wait at least (5) dosage intervals and ensure that you suffer no adverse effects from it before flying while on the medication. (See the table below for the recommended observation period).

Drug Facts	
Active ingredient (in each tablet)	Purpose
Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg	Antihistamine
Uses temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergens: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• sneezing• runny nose• itchy, watery eyes• itchy throat	
Warnings Ask a doctor before use if you have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• glaucoma• a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis• trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives.	
When using this product <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You may get drowsy.• Avoid alcoholic drinks.• Anxious, restless, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness.• Be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery.• Irritability may occur, especially in children.	
If pregnant or breastfeeding, ask a health professional before use. Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.	
Directions Adults and children 12 years and over: Take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours, not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours. Children 6 years to under 12 years: Take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours, not more than 24 tablets in 24 hours. Children under 6 years: Ask a doctor.	
Other information Store at 20-25°C (68-77°F). <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protect from excessive moisture.	
Inactive ingredients DSC yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch.	

!! IMPORTANT !!

**NEVER FLY AFTER TAKING A NEW MEDICATION FOR THE FIRST TIME UNTIL
AT LEAST 48 HOURS HAVE PASSED AND NO SIDE EFFECTS ARE NOTED.**

4. NO GO Medications:

If you take any of the NO GO medications listed in the OTC Medications Reference Table OR if you have previously had side effects from the medication, **wait at least five (5) dosage intervals after the last dose before flying**. See examples on the following page of dosage interval wait time for the recommended grounding period after discontinuation of the medication.

Dosage Interval Wait Time

PACKAGE INSTRUCTIONS	5 TIMES DOSAGE INTERVAL	NO FLY TIME	RECOMMENDATION
Every 4-6 hours^ (Up to 6 times daily)	x 5	30 hours	Wait at least 30 hours before flying if taking a medication directed to take every 4-6 hours.
Every 8 hours (OR three times daily)	x 5	40 hours	Wait at least 40 hours before flying if taking a medication directed to take every 8 hours.
Every 12 hours (OR twice daily)	x 5	60 hours	Wait at least 60 hours before flying if taking a medication directed to take every 12 hours.

^If there is a range, use the higher number

Caution: Sedating antihistamine medications have a long half-life so wait time is **60 hours** for both diphenhydramine (**Benadryl**) and doxylamine (**Unisom**), 5 days for both chlorpheniramine and clemastine.

Always follow 14 CFR 61.53. If it is not familiar to you, please review it. Not only is it a requirement, but it is for your safety and that of your passengers.

When in doubt, SAFETY FIRST - DO NOT FLY.

- ☐ Do one more check of your condition before considering flying.
- ☐ Get well before considering return to flight status. Do not push it.
- ☐ Remember, OTC medications help reduce the symptoms of an illness, but do not cure it.
- ☐ Even though a medication has been determined to be safe for use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), this does not mean that the medication is compatible with flying or even driving.
- ☐ If you choose to fly on medication, be certain that it will not impair safety. Do not simply hope for the best.

See the **OTC Medications Reference Table** on the following page for specific information.

OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICATIONS REFERENCE TABLE

The following table is **not** all-inclusive or intended to take the place of consultation(s) with your primary care physician and/or Aviation Medical Examiner.

Remember, if you have significant underlying health conditions, it is recommended that you discuss the use of any medication with your physician **BEFORE** taking the OTC medication.

Some medications are not recommended (see column “NO GO” in the table below):

MEDICATIONS OR SYMPTOMS	COMMONLY FOUND IN	GENERALLY SAFE TO FLY Medication or active ingredient GO	AVOID These can cause incapacitation. Examples are NOT all-inclusive. NO GO	RATIONALE
Antihistamines	Allergy products Cough/cold products Pain products	Non-sedating products: fexofenadine (Allegra) loratadine (Claritin)	Sedating products: brompheniramine (Dimetapp) cetirizine (Zyrtec) chlorpheniramine (Chlor- Trimeton) diphenhydramine (Benadryl) levocetirizine (Xyzal)	Histamines affect allergies AND sleep/ wake cycle. Sedating antihistamines can cause drowsiness and impaired thinking and judgement. NOTE: Sedating antihistamines are commonly found in autopsy after aircraft accidents. The wait times for these medications are longer than noted in the “Dosage Interval Wait Timetable” due to their longer half-life. Consult your AME.
	Motion sickness		dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) meclizine (Antivert)	
	Sleep aid products	melatonin (not an antihistamine)	diphenhydramine (e.g., Zzzquil, Benadryl). Doxylamine (e.g., Unisom)	“Hang-over effect” morning after safety concern. NOTE: Taking melatonin at the wrong time can actually worsen jetlag and cause daytime drowsiness.

MEDICATIONS OR SYMPTOMS	COMMONLY FOUND IN	GENERALLY SAFE TO FLY Medication or active ingredient GO	AVOID These can cause incapacitation. Examples are NOT all-inclusive. NO GO	RATIONALE
Nasal steroid	Allergy products	azelastine (Astepro) fluticasone (Flonase) mometasone (Nasonex) triamcinolone (Nasacort)		
Nasal decongestants	Nasal congestion, sinus pressure, and cough/cold products	oxymetazoline (Afrin) phenylephrine (Sudafed PE) pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) Less convenient, but safer, are the nasal saltwater lavages: saline nasal sprays Neti-pots		CAUTION: Sudafed- like medications can speed up your heart rate; therefore, use caution if you have an underlying heart condition. Be very cautious of an extra cup of coffee or two when feeling sub-par. This has caused more than one pilot to end up in the emergency room for a racing heart rate.
Cough	Cough/cold products	Coricidin (allowed If it does not contain chlorpheniramine) guaifenesin (found in Mucinex and Robitussin)	dextromethorphan (Delsym) Also in Dayquil, and Mucinex Fast-Max Severe Congestion and Cough. Most “night-time” or “PM” medications contain a sedating antihistamine. Coricidin HBP cough & cold (contains chlorpheniramine) Nyquil (contains doxylamine)	Most cough medications are safe for flight. Use caution as combination products may contain sedating antihistamines. If the label states PM (for nighttime use) or DM (containing dextromethorphan), you should not fly while using these medications and for at least 5 dosage intervals after the last dose (see Dosage Interval Timetable).

MEDICATIONS OR SYMPTOMS	COMMONLY FOUND IN	GENERALLY SAFE TO FLY Medication or active ingredient GO	AVOID These can cause incapacitation. Examples are NOT all-inclusive. NO GO	RATIONALE
Aches and Pains	NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) and analgesics	acetaminophen (Tylenol) aspirin (Bayer) ibuprofen (Advil/Motrin) naproxen (Naprosyn)	Advil PM Tylenol PM Most “PM” medications contain diphenhydramine	Most OTC pain meds are safe to fly as long as the underlying condition is acceptable. CAUTION: Some OTC meds are combined with a sedating antihistamine, which can cause drowsiness (see antihistamine row). CAUTION: With lidocaine application, avoid getting on hands or open wounds as this can drop blood pressure or absorb faster.
	Additional options for headaches	Caffeine (Commonly found in Excedrin.)	Read the label.	
	Topical rubs Pain patches	lidocaine patch (Lidoderm) muscle rub capsaicin		
Opioid Antidote	Opioid antidote		naloxone (Narcan)	CAUTION: If medication is administered, DO NOT FLY until cleared by FAA.
Gastrointestinal Nausea Vomiting Diarrhea	Anti-emetics Anti-motility drugs	bismuth subsalicylate (Kaopectate, Pepto-Bismol)	loperamide (Imodium)	GI illness can cause dehydration, cramps, and pain with increase in altitude. NOTE: Loperamide should not be used during acute illness as it can cause dizziness. When taken daily for a chronic condition, it may require a special issuance.

MEDICATIONS OR SYMPTOMS	COMMONLY FOUND IN	GENERALLY SAFE TO FLY Medication or active ingredient GO	AVOID These can cause incapacitation. Examples are NOT all-inclusive. NO GO	RATIONALE
Gastrointestinal Constipation Laxatives		Bulk forming (e.g., Benefiber) Osmotic (e.g., MiraLAX) Stool softener (e.g., Colace) Stimulant (e.g., Senna)	magnesium citrate	Use in recommended doses.
Gastrointestinal Indigestion	Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPI)	esomeprazole (Nexium) lansoprazole (Prevacid) omeprazole (Prilosec) pantoprazole (Protonix) rabeprazole (Aciphex)		Be careful not to mask the underlying symptoms.
	H2 blockers	cimetidine (Tagamet) famotidine (Pepcid) nizatidine (Axid) rantidine (Zantac)		Be careful not to mask the underlying symptoms.
	Antacids	Aluminum hydroxide (Maalox) Calcium carbonate (Tums) Magnesium hydroxide (Milk of Magnesia)		Be careful not to mask the underlying symptoms.

MEDICATIONS OR SYMPTOMS	COMMONLY FOUND IN	GENERALLY SAFE TO FLY Medication or active ingredient GO	AVOID These can cause incapacitation. Examples are NOT all-inclusive. NO GO	RATIONALE
Urinary tract Infections	Pain reliever	phenazopyridine (AZO standard)	Oxybutynin (Oxytrol for women)	Oxybutynin can cause sedation and dizziness. Phenazopyridine is generally allowed after adequate ground trial to monitor for side effects. Symptoms should be resolved other than slight residual irritation.
Skin rash	Emollients Creams Lotions	Almost all are allowed. Anti-fungal topical Antipruritics Topical corticosteroid		Ensure the underlying condition is not an issue with safe flight.
Dry or itchy eyes	Products for dry eyes Allergy/itchy eyes Eye lubrication	olopatadine (Pataday) alcaftadine (Lastacraft) artificial tears	Eye ointment or gel during flight.	Temporary blurry vision may occur with use of eye drops. Note: Eye ointment or gels should not be used in flight since the blurry vision may last for minutes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [AAM-400 Medication Brochure](#)
- [Over-the-Counter Medication](#)
- [Allergy - Antihistamine & Immunotherapy Medication](#)
- [Erectile Dysfunction Medication](#)
- [Hypertension Medication](#)
- [Acceptable Combinations of Diabetic Medications](#)
- [Antidepressant Program](#)
- [Additional Medication Information in Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners](#)
- [Do Not Issue \(DNI\) Do Not Fly \(DNF\)](#)
 - DNI - pilots should NOT take any of these medications or classes of medication and fly.
 - DNF - pilots should NOT fly until these medications are stopped and a period of time has elapsed.