

## Drug Use and Accident Risk among Pilots

In 2014, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) published a report examining the impairment trends in the prevalence of controlled substances, over-the-counter medications and illicit drugs used by pilots who died in aviation accidents between 1990 and 2012. The goal of the study was to describe the prevalence of OTC and prescription medications among those pilots who died and to examine the needs and recommendations for safety improvements.

The study reviewed a population of 6,677 pilots who died in aviation accidents between 1990 and 2012. The percent of pilots with positive toxicology results for all drugs increased over time (NTSB, 2014). Patterns of increased drug use were consistent with overall drug use trends in the U.S. at the time. Benadryl and Unisom products were found to be the most common drugs used.

The study concluded that the overall risk of pilot impairment increased over the time of the study. Recommendations to improve safety included: 1) increased education for pilots regarding the effects of medications that cause impairment; 2) ensure that pilots have approved medical certificates prior to flying and 3) provide education and awareness to providers regarding transportation safety risks associated with certain medication. Patient education is paramount regarding the effects of impairment.

Please remember the importance of routinely discussing with patients the effect their diagnosed medical conditions or recommended drugs may have on their ability to safely operate a vehicle in any mode of transportation.

A link to the original study can be found at: <https://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-studies/Documents/ss1401.pdf>

NTSB (2014). Drug Use Trends in Aviation: Assessing the Risk of Pilot Impairment. National Transportation Safety Board. <https://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-studies/Documents/ss1401.pdf>