



## "Can You Cheat on Safety-Yes or No?"

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Those of us who utilize the FAA Wings Program to stay current on safety issues being studied by the FAA may run across a presentation titled "Gaming the System." In this material the FAA discussed results from the General Aviation Joint Steering Committee and other studies that touch on aeromedical factors identified in a selection of general aviation accident investigations. These factors are often the result of pilots, knowingly or unknowingly, "cheating" on safety mitigations built into the FAA regulations regarding medical issues for pilots. The intent of the rules is to reduce or eliminate medical factors in aviation accidents. The problem with these rules, like many others, is that the pilot plays an important role in the enforcement of the rules. While cheating on the rules is possible, and in some cases very easily done, the impact of doing so often has severe consequences in the long run.

Pilots are used to doing self-assessments for their suitability to fly on any particular day. We use the **IM SAFE checklist** to try and decide whether we can/should fly or not, but human nature can lead us to be bias towards answers (promoting cheating) to some of the questions asked like:

- Am I feeling ill today?
- Am I taking any prescription or over-the-counter medication that could compromise my ability to fly?
- Am I under unusual stress today?
- What about my alcohol consumption last night?

As pilots we are also required to undergo periodic examinations from licensed physicians to exercise the privileges of our pilot certificates. Federal regulation 14 CFR 61.23 establishes pilot medical certification requirements. We all follow the rules, do the paperwork correctly, and subject ourselves to the medical exam periodically to fly. But were you honest on the medical history questions? Many of the questions that seek to determine if you have suffered from any number of medical conditions have a safety of flight component behind them.

### **Looking at one example:**

Say during the period before your medical exam you suffered from a kidney stone. You figure it was no big deal, just a lot of pain, some good medications at the emergency room, and the stone was gone the next day. Do you include it on your next medical form? You figure it was not important, but it is on the form for a reason. The condition often results in debilitating pain and vomiting. Not a good situation to have recur while flying right? Did you know that the FAA considers it medically disqualifying beyond the first occurrence? Do you cheat or report it? There are other situations that have a similar impact. Every lose conscience in your lifetime? Suffered from symptoms of a stroke? Some occurrences are very innocuous but are indicators of dangerous things to come. Why risk your life, the lives of your passengers and fellow crew members, and people on the ground by cheating on a medical form?

Also, recall that 14 CFR 61.53 calls for the "Prohibition on operations during medical deficiency". If you are suffering from a medical condition after you are granted a FAA medical, it is expected that you will ground yourself until you are treated and cleared for the condition. Consulting your FAA medical examiner will answer your question about long term impacts of the condition.

Many of us are not taking advantage of BasicMed as an alternative to the traditional medical certification. There are now over 50,000 pilots using BasicMed to satisfy the medical certification requirements but the existence of BasicMed implies that it is easier to cheat the system. So, you meet all the requirements for BasicMed, you have done your exam and the education course requirements, but you are applying for BasicMed while your medical certificate is under review by the FAA. The downside of this is that, if the FAA rejects your traditional FAA medical application, then your BasicMed is voided. Likewise, if your traditional medical certificate application is withdrawn your Basic Medical will also be void.

What about cheating while using medications? From the FAA presentation "In a 2011 study conducted by FAA's CAMI Toxicology Lab, drugs/medications were found in 570 pilots (42%) from 1,353 total deceased pilots tested. Most of the pilots with positive drug results, 511 (90%), were flying under CFR Part 91." Is it a good idea to fly while taking medication? We all know that **some** medications may compromise your ability to control the aircraft and/or adversely affect judgment and decision-making, but how do you know for sure? You can check the "do not fly" list for medications at the end of this article, but you have to ask yourself "what medical condition is causing me to take this medication? If you are no longer taking the medication, it is a good idea to wait until 5 times the dosage interval has passed before flying.

It is also possible to cheat while using some of the most recently "approved" substances including CBD and medical and recreational marijuana. While they are approved in some states they are not approved at the federal level and even if they were, the FAA rules require that you not be "under the influence" of any substance regardless of its approval.

Bottom line here is that cheating on safety risk mitigations built into the rules is relatively easy but has lasting consequences if it does not work. Likewise, cheating will not be looked upon favorably during any enforcement action by the FAA or CAP for that matter. Wouldn't it be easier to make the decision for yourself and be grounded rather than deal with all the negative stuff that can happen if your cheating doesn't work?

FAA Safety Team - <https://www.faasafety.gov/>

Do Not Issue - Do Not Fly Lists - [FAA - Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners](#)

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