



Aerospace Medicine Services International

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FAA Approved Sleep Aids for Pilots

It is no secret that continued use of sleep aids may pose a potential risk to aviation safety, due to effects of the sleep aid itself or the underlying reason/condition for enlisting its use. Frequent use of sleep aids, both prescription and over the counter, may cause impairment of mental processes and altered reaction times, even when the pilot perceives that he/she is fully awake, alert and fit for duty.

There are essentially **five** FAA approved sleep aids for pilots ~ **Lunesta (eszopiclone), Restoril (temazepam), Rozerem (ramelteon), Sonata (zaleplon), and Zolpidem**. Zolpidem comes in various strengths and formulations under the following trade names: Ambien, Ambien CR (extended release), Edluar (dissolves under the tongue), Intermezzo (for middle of the night awakening), and Zolpimist (oral spray). Each drug, formulation and strength has its own half-life and associated wait times based on the pharmacologic elimination half-life of the drug (half-life is the time it takes to clear half of the absorbed dose from the body). The minimum required wait time after the last dose of sleep aid is 5-times the maximum elimination half-life. The table below lists the commonly prescribed sleep aids and their required minimum wait times (5 half-lives).

Trade Name	Generic Name	Required Minimum Wait Time After Last Dose Before Resuming Pilot Duties
Lunesta	eszopiclone	30 hours
Restoril	temazepam	72 hours
Rozerem	ramelteon	24 hours
Sonata	zaleplon	6 hours
Ambien	zolpidem*	24 hours
Ambien CR	zolpidem (extended release)	24 hours
Edluar	zolpidem (dissolves under the tongue)	36 hours
Intermezzo	zolpidem (for middle of the night awakening)	36 hours
Zolpimist	zolpidem (oral spray)	48 hours

*Note: The different formulations of Zolpidem have different half-lives, resulting in different wait times.

The FAA permits occasional or limited use of sleep aids, such as for circadian rhythm disruption in commercial air operations. Daily/Nightly use of sleep aids is not allowed regardless of the underlying cause or reason. There are two situations during which a pilot may choose to use sleep aids: (1) Rest Periods (Required 10-hour rest period of which 8 hours is an uninterrupted sleep opportunity) and (2) Cumulative Flight Duty & Flight Time Limits (Required 30 consecutive hours free from duty on a weekly basis). During the 10-hour Rest Period, the sleep aid Sonata is the only acceptable option based on the 6-hour required minimum wait time. Ambien, Ambien CR and Rozerem may be taken 24 or more hours prior to reporting for fit for duty from home base or during an extended layover. All other sleep aids are not feasible in most cases based on their lengthy half-lives and required minimum wait times.



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Medical conditions that chronically interfere with sleep are disqualifying regardless of whether a sleep aid is used or not. Primary sleep disorders such as sleep apnea and insomnia or psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety are of major concern and should be diagnosed and the underlying condition treated before clearance for aviation duties.

Developing a close relationship with a knowledgeable and experienced Senior Aviation Medical Examiner (AME) is pivotal to achieving optimal health required for fitness for duty. **Aerospace Medicine Services International** is a new AME practice conveniently located at 660 S. Federal Hwy, Suite 100 in Pompano Beach, providing all classes of FAA Flight Physicals for pilots and Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS), Special Issuance (SI), HIMS (Human Intervention Motivation Study) SSRI, Return to Work and Expert Witness Consultation. Additionally, **Aerospace Medicine Services International** offers the VIP (Very Important Pilot) Program specializing in Primary Care concierge services tailored to the unique healthcare needs of pilots and ATCS. To reach the On-Call Nurse or to make an appointment, call **954-951-6080**.

References:

Federal Aviation Administration. *Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners: "Pharmaceuticals (Therapeutic Medications) Sleep Aids"*, updated April 12, 2016.

Federal Aviation Administration. *Fact Sheet – Pilot Fatigue Rule Comparison* (December 21, 2011).