



IMHONEST:

PUSHING A FAMILIAR ACRONYM FURTHER

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Steve Tyer, a safety consultant and auditor, recently offered some thoughts on preflight safety tips. One of the things he brought up was the need for pilots and other aviation crewmembers to do a self-assessment before flight.

Preparing for flight becomes routine. The routine typically includes checking weather, performing an aircraft preflight and using various checklists. But mission priorities play an important role in how quickly these items are accomplished, and we do some things hastily or not at all. Most pilots and public safety aviation crewmembers have been taught that at some point they should conduct a mental and physical check to determine whether they are safe to fly.

One well-known acronym for performing the check, which Tyer suggests using, is IMSAFE. The Federal Aviation Administration and other regulatory agencies often use IMSAFE, as well, defining the following steps to determine fitness to fly:

- **Illness.** Am I feeling sick or feverish? Do I have a headache or upset stomach?
- **Medication.** What medications am I taking? Are they prescribed or over-the-counter? How do they affect me?
- **Stress.** How much stress am I under? Is it more than usual?
- **Alcohol.** How long has it been since I felt the effects of alcohol?
- **Fatigue.** How much sleep did I get? Was it less than normal?
- **Eating.** Did I eat a real meal, grab some quick snacks, or eat nothing at all?

The process begins in a straightforward manner. Before you fly or go up as part of an aircrew, you ask yourself if you have any illnesses or symptoms that could prevent you from flying safely. Then, you think through any medications that are not approved for flight. Even a cold medication can fall into the category.

Next, we must consider our stress level. This is the millennium of stress. Financial issues, social activities, family and work are all areas of our lives that can bring on stress. The ability to recognize when you are at your stress limit is critical to both your health and safety. To make matters worse, we often attempt to ease our stress or relax by using alcohol. Alcohol's effects can be felt long after we take our last drink. So, the eight (or 10) hours from "bottle to throttle" rule of thumb is intended to ensure the effects are no longer evident.

Fatigue is also a common issue for public safety aviation crews. How much sleep is needed can vary for every individual. This is another area in which we must recognize our own true limit. For some, six hours of sleep might be required; others may need eight hours.

Nutrition, or "eating" for the purposes of the acronym, is often driven by time constraints and the availability



of healthy options. But we make our own choices. Do we opt for a protein bar or a bag of chips when we're in a hurry? Likewise, five cups of coffee may not be what's best for us when we need water to aid hydration.

The six items in the IMSAFE checklist have been part of many pilots' preflight preparation for decades. But what if we take it a step forward and ask ourselves if we are really being honest about our health and fitness when we say, "IMSAFE." The need to be honest with ourselves is particularly strong when we have been in the aviation field for many years. Many industry veterans become complacent and ignore changes to their health. Sometimes, we might accept subtle differences as temporary. And we may not admit to ourselves any differences that could affect our annual medical requirements.

So, let's consider the acronym IMHONEST: integrity with medical professionals, honesty with yourself, occasional symptom recognition, night vision comfort level, eyes and changes in

vision, strain of muscle weakness or joint pain, and truth—how we really feel.

Almost every pilot at some point becomes anxious about the annual or biannual medical requirements for maintaining their certificate. Some doctors are more critical than others. Renewal forms include questions that can be interpreted in different ways. We may be stressed about obtaining the same level of medical certification we had before. Having integrity with medical personnel is the first place to start. This routine requirement is not the only place to be honest. We can do a personal assessment that can have a lasting effect on our personal health.

Consider some of the changes to your metabolism as you grow older. Can you still eat three burgers and fries or a couple of pizzas with a six pack of beer? You may find that an extra pound or two could now put you in the pre-diabetic stage. A frequent ache or pain in the shoulder could point toward minor muscle damage or arthritis. Arthritis may be the

reason you changed a workout routine. A change in vision might indicate a need for corrective lenses or bifocals. Night vision can change—even when you are using goggles. We must consider all these issues, and the symptoms occur gradually over time, making them harder to detect. Being honest with yourself about changes you can correct will help not only your ability to maintain your medical status, but also prolong your good health.

IMSAFE is a personal checklist that ensures you are saying you are physically and mentally fit to fly or act as a public safety aviation crewmember. IMHONEST is a personal checklist that ensures you are not only fit to serve, save and protect from the air, but also honest with yourself about your health and wellbeing—not just for this flight but for your long-term professional and personal life. The ultimate goal of the job is to go home after the mission. The ultimate goal of being honest is to ensure you can enjoy your life for a long time to come. 🐾