



AVIATION MEDICAL BULLETIN™

PUBLISHED BY HARVEY WATT & COMPANY BECAUSE HEALTH AND FITNESS MATTER TO AVIATORS

SPECIAL ISSUE: Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a sleep disorder that is caused by complete or partial obstructions of the upper airway. Individuals who suffer from OSA experience repetitive episodes of shallow or paused breathing that typically last from 20 to 40 seconds. As a result of these pauses, individuals can experience excessive daytime sleepiness, personality disturbances, cardiac problems, high blood pressure, and many other cognitive problems to include decreased memory, and decreased ability to plan, problem solve, or multitask. Individuals with OSA are rarely aware of their breathing difficulties, and many have suffered unknowingly for years. Obviously, all of these problems would contribute to an unsafe flying environment, and fortunately, almost everyone who is suffering from OSA can be treated.

In 2015 the FAA issued new guidance to Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) regarding OSA. AMEs now are required to assess everyone at the time of their periodic and comment regarding their findings on the FAA 8500-8 physical examination form. Airmen who are determined to be at risk for OSA and thus require further evaluation will be allowed to continue to fly while the additional assessments are being performed. If it is determined that an individual has sleep apnea and needs treatment, the FAA Federal Air Surgeon has established and expedited policy to help the airman get a special issuance and continue flying.

Remember, if you experience any difficulties with this new policy, the Harvey Watt Aeromedical Staff is standing by to help.