Study finds majority of pilots nod off mid-flight

2nd November 2026



A new report has raised serious concerns about pilot fatigue. The European Cockpit Association (ECA) conducted a survey of nearly 7,200 pilots across 32 countries. It discovered that exhaustion in the cockpit is a widespread and underreported problem. More than three-quarters of respondents said they had briefly dozed off while operating an aircraft in the month before the survey. Almost a quarter of them admitted they continued flying even when they were too tired. Furthermore, half said they had operated a flight when they should have declared themselves unfit for duty. Tiredness can result from long working hours, insufficient rest, and unpredictable schedules.

The pilots were very frank in their answers to the survey questions. Many said they were reluctant to report fatigue because they feared punishment or other negative reactions from their bosses. Captain Coen George, a director of the ECA, warned: "When pilots fear career consequences, fatigue goes unreported and the risk returns to the cockpit." Aviation safety experts say exhaustion can impair judgement, slow reaction times and prevent pilots from responding effectively to unexpected in-flight situations. The experts urged airlines to foster a culture in which pilots can report tiredness without fear of repercussions. Carriers should ensure that passenger safety is their top priority.

Sources: fodors.com / *euronews.com* / *theguardian.com*

Writing

All pilots, train drivers, bus drivers, etc. should be tested for tiredness. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

serious concerns / pilots / fatigue / cockpit / doze off / aircraft / flight / duty / rest / frankness / reluctance / punishment / negative reactions / bosses / judgement

True / False

1) The World Cockpit Association carried out a study on pilot fatigue. T / F
2) A study into pilot fatigue looked at 32,000 pilots in 72 countries. T / F
3) Three-quarters of pilots said they had never dozed off while flying. T / F
4) Half of the pilots said they flew even though they were too tired to. T / F
5) Many pilots are worried about reporting fatigue to their bosses. T / F
6) Aviation experts said fatigue leads to poor judgement. T / F
7) The experts urged airlines to make it easier for pilots to report fatigue. T / F
8) The article said pilot safety should be an airline's top priority. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

1.	**raised**	a.	work
2.	**conducted**	b.	harm
3.	**briefly**	c.	unwilling
4.	**admitted**	d.	carried out
5.	**duty**	e.	confessed
6.	**frank**	f.	encouraged
7.	**reluctant**	g.	brought up
8.	**impair**	h.	prime concern
9.	**urged**	i.	candid
10.	**priority**	j.	momentarily

Discussion – Student A

a) What do you think about what you read?
b) What can pilots do to stay alert?
c) What do you do when you are fatigued?
d) What punishment might pilots get for flying while exhausted?
e) Has your judgement ever been impaired by exhaustion?
f) Do you worry about flying?
g) Should airplanes be piloted by AI?
h) What questions would you like to ask a pilot?

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Phrase Match

1. A new report has raised serious
2. a widespread and
3. they had briefly
4. they should have declared themselves
5. insufficient
6. The pilots were very frank
7. Many said they were reluctant
8. exhaustion can
9. responding effectively to unexpected
10. passenger safety is their

a. in their answers
b. dozed off
c. in-flight situations
d. rest
e. concerns about pilot fatigue
f. top priority
g. impair judgement
h. underreported problem
i. to report fatigue
j. unfit for duty

Discussion – Student B

a) Would you like to be a pilot?
b) What are the good and bad things about being a pilot?
c) What do you think when you see a pilot?
d) How much responsibility does a pilot have?
e) How often are you fatigued?
f) What can airlines do about pilot fatigue?
g) How often do you doze off?
h) What advice do you have for airline companies?

Spelling

1. in the ccpkito
2. three-quarters of sednrntpeos
3. they had readoetp a flight
4. cadldere themselves unfit for duty
5. nuceitsiffni rest
6. lbectuienpdra schedules
7. they were eltrucatn to
8. pilots fear career ocnsseueeqnc
9. iaivtaon safety experts
10. exsntoiahu can impair judgement
11. without fear of srrpeineussco
12. passenger safety is their top ytiorpri

Answers – Synonym Match

1. g	2. d	3. j	4. e	5. a
6. i	7. c	8. b	9. f	10. h

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions. (Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What is the name of the organization that conducted a survey?
2.	How many pilots took part in a study?
3.	How many of the pilots admitted to dozing off at the controls?
4.	How many pilots said they flew despite being too tired?
5.	What can cause fatigue besides long working hours and insufficient rest?
6.	What were many pilots hesitant to report?
7.	What did many pilots fear?
8.	What did safety experts say exhaustion impairs?
9.	What can fatigue prevent pilots from responding to?
10.	What does the article say should be the top priority of airlines?

Speaking – Exhausting

Rank these with your partner. Put the most exhausting things at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Jet lag
- Commuting
- Shopping
- Overthinking
- Studying English
- Small talk
- Parenting
- Housework

Answers – True False

1	F	2	F	3	F	4	T	5	T	6	T	7	T	8	F

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.

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