



Medical Certificates

The medical examination and certificate is a prerequisite to flying as PIC as Student, Private, Commercial, or Airline Transport Pilot. Glider pilots and Sport Pilots do not require an aeromedical examination.

For the healthy, the examination usually takes less time than making the appointment. Can you hear the doctor whisper? Can you read an eye chart?

Here is the process. At the appointed hour you walk into the office of the aeromedical examiner (often a doctor with a practice of internal medicine). You fill out an [FAA form 8500-8](#) with demographic information and your health history. From this moment, three outcomes are possible: issuance, denial, or deferment. This form has a serial number on it, so you cannot simply tear it up if the examination isn't going well. You, of course, want a medical certificate issued, or you wouldn't have gone to the doctor.

I was astounded to discover that of the 400,000 medical issued each year, 164,000 of them are special issuances. A special issuance means someone at the FAA in Oklahoma City must review your application, rather than simply rubber-stamping the finding of your local aeromedical examiner.

The list of [disqualifying conditions](#) is published all over the web, as are the [official examination standards](#). If you have a clearly disqualifying condition, we suggest that you not go for an examination at all. A disqualification prohibits you from flying even as a Sport Pilot. This is one of the few instances where not seeing a doctor puts you in a better position – at least with respect to flying.

For those people who have a minor condition, or a condition being successfully treated to a long-term stable condition, the medical process is crucial. It can mean the difference between some extra paperwork and a long and frustrating battle with the bureaucracy.

If you have, for example, a history of kidney stones and you are asymptomatic, you will probably get a medical. Twenty-two thousand other pilots have. When you leave the doctor's office on the day of your examination, you will not leave with a certificate. You will leave with an admonition to collect your medical history from your urologist and bring it to your aeromedical examiner for forwarding to the FAA in Oklahoma City.

When you collect your paperwork, make sure that you provide all of the information requested. The single leading cause for rejection of applications for special issuance is incomplete paperwork. Fully 80% of denials are the result of incomplete paperwork. Whether this is the result of truly incomplete files, pilots who gave up on the process, or a convenient excuse by the document examiners is a matter for discussion. In my experience, the paper chase often leads to additional symptoms of mental disease by the time you finish working with the various offices.

If you have any inkling that you may have a possibly disqualifying condition, we have some advice. You can guess for yourself whether you do or don't simply by having a look at FAA form. If you answer "yes" to a history of suicide attempt, you can be sure your application will get extra attention. We wouldn't advise you to lie on the form, but we would recommend you consider you choose your words carefully in the explanatory section. Therefore, we recommend the follow strategy. Call the examiner's office and make an appointment for a [consultation](#). Make no mention of the FAA or aeromedical or anything associated with flying. If you do, the admitting nurse is likely to hand you an FAA form, which is exactly what you don't want. When you see the doctor, tell him you want him to examine and interview you for an FAA medical of the class you need. Ask him or her, "If I were to present myself tomorrow in the same shape I am today, would you issue me a medical?" If the answer is no, then ask whether a special issuance is likely, and if so how should the questions be answered. No matter how much the charge is for the extra doctor visit, it will be less than the aggravation of chasing the paperwork through multiple doctor's offices and Oklahoma City.

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