

Transient Global Amnesia (TGA)

Transient Global Amnesia (TGA) is a sudden temporary episode of memory loss that is not caused by any of the more common neurological conditions such as stroke or epilepsy. The condition itself is relatively rare, apparently harmless, and unlikely to happen again. Once the episode has settled, often relatively quickly, the memory is usually fine.

Why is TGA an aviation safety problem?

While a pilot or air traffic controller has symptoms of TGA (primarily memory loss) the CAA considers them as being 'unfit' and will suspend / disqualify their medical certificate.

Once the initial problems have settled, the main aviation safety concerns with TGA relate more to the other conditions that can cause the same symptoms, and not so much to the TGA itself. TGA itself is considered by CAA as being benign once the initial symptoms have settled and everything is back to normal.

The difficulty lies in adequately ensuring that the problem is actually TGA and not due to a stroke, a seizure (fit), or an unusual type of migraine.

CAUTION

This Medical Information Sheet contains general advice concerning the CAA's regulatory handling of medical conditions. This sheet is not intended as clinical medical advice and should not ever be used as the basis of decisions concerning your medical care. You should consult your medical advisers and discuss your options thoroughly with them before making any decisions about your medical care.

What should I do about my TGA?

In the first instance you should consult a medical practitioner, if possible your GP who has information concerning your past medical history. It is likely that your GP will refer you to a specialist neurologist to confirm the diagnosis and make sure that your problem is not caused by some other medical condition.

The medical practitioners involved in your care will take notes and other records, and those will be very useful to the CAA for considering your return to flying.

Of course you must also report the episode to the CAA, as required under section 27C of the Civil Aviation Act. You can expect the CAA to initially suspend your medical certificate while further information is being obtained.

How does CAA respond to a diagnosis of TGA?

As soon as CAA becomes aware of a diagnosis of TGA the pilot or air traffic controller involved will have their medical certificate suspended, and subsequently disqualified.

The diagnosis of TGA, and usually the unrestricted return of the medical certificate, will be accepted based on:

1. A thorough initial assessment and report from a neurologist; and
2. The passage of twelve months without any problems suggesting another, different, diagnosis.

Does that mean I am grounded for a year?

Yes. This is because TGA is primarily a diagnosis of exclusion, becoming satisfied that the problems are not caused by other medical conditions, and the fact that the likely other conditions (e.g. strokes and seizures) are very important from an aviation safety perspective.

This reasoning, and approach, applies to class 1, 2, and 3 medical certificates.

My doctor says I'm fine. Why can't I fly right away?

TGA itself is thought to be a relatively benign condition, but a number of other conditions that can cause similar symptoms are of significant aviation safety concern. Since TGA is a diagnosis of exclusion, and cannot be made with certainty, the CAA requires a year to elapse without any further symptoms before the diagnosis of TGA is accepted as being safe enough for your return to flying.

What else could cause these symptoms?

A variety of medical conditions can cause short and long term memory impairments. The ones that are most likely to resemble TGA include strokes or Transient Ischaemic Attacks (See MIS 011—Strokes and Transient Ischaemic Attacks), seizures or convulsions, or variants of migraines.

From a safety point of view, and also often from a health care point of view, it is important to be confident that your symptoms have not been caused by one of these more serious medical conditions.

What if I don't agree with a CAA medical decision concerning my TGA?

You are always able to seek review of CAA medical certification decisions. For further information on review / appeal options you may wish to consult MIS 005 'What Are My Review Options?' on the medical section of the CAA website (www.caa.govt.nz).

Looking at the law**Civil Aviation Act**

The civil aviation act contains no direct references to Transient Global Amnesia.

Section 27C(1) of the Act describes the obligations that a licence holder has to report medical conditions to the CAA.

Civil Aviation Rule Part 67: Medical Standards

The civil aviation rules contain no direct references to Transient Global Amnesia.

Rules 67.103(b)(1) (Class 1), 67.105(b)(1) (Class 2), and 67.107(b)(1) (Class 3) contain a very general medical standard that relates to TGA: An applicant must have no medical condition that is of aeromedical significance.

The nervous system medical standards (e.g. 67.103(c)(1), 67.105(c)(1), and 67.107(b)(1)) contain similar, general, standards that also apply.

General Directions

There are no general directions that relate specifically to Transient Global Amnesia.

CAA Medical Help Desk

Tel: +64-4-560 9466 Fax: +64-4-560 9470
Email: med@caa.govt.nz web site: www.caa.govt.nz