

The Diving Medical Advisory Committee

DMAC, Eighth Floor, 52 Grosvenor Gardens, London SW1W 0AU, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7824 5520 · Fax: +44 (0) 20 7824 5521

www.dmac-diving.org
info@dmac-diving.org

Flying After Diving

Recommendations

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Introduction

The guidance note for flying after diving was published in 1982 and reviewed by the committee in 1996, but not changed. We are not aware of any incidents in commercial diving in the North Sea that have been associated with adherence to those guidelines. One case of musculoskeletal decompression illness (DCI) was observed after a flight with several stops following air diving in the Netherlands. The guidelines have possibly never been seriously tested, as the time between dives and flying usually is longer than that recommended in the guidelines.

Decompression to altitude after diving always carries a risk for DCI, in particular if the diver has any symptoms (see later). This, together with our evaluation of the existing experimental evidence, is the basis of the new recommendations.

For the purpose of these guidelines, it was considered that diving could be divided into two categories, viz.:

- 1 Air and nitrox diving
- 2 Mixed gas diving.

Two maxima of cabin altitude were considered, viz.:

- a) A maximum altitude of 2000' (600m), provided the predicted flight plan has been checked.
- b) A maximum altitude of 8000' (2,600m), all other flights.

Caution

- 1 The times given below are minimum times; longer time intervals are recommended, in particular if the planned journey involves a number of take-offs. Shorter times may be considered but only after the advice of a qualified medical doctor
- 2 Flying in the presence of even minor symptoms or residua of decompression illness carries a considerable risk of provoking serious neurological illness.

I Diving without Decompression Illness (DCI) problems

		Minimum times before flying at cabin altitude	
		2000' (600 m)	All other flights
1.1	No-stop dives Total time under pressure less than 60 minutes within previous 12 hours	2 hours	8 hours (24 hours)*
1.2	All other air and nitrox diving, heliox and mixed gas bounce diving (less than 4 hours under pressure)	12 hours	24 hours
1.3	Heliox saturation (more than 4 hours under pressure)		
1.4	Air, Nitrox or Trimix saturation (more than 4 hours under pressure)	24 hours	48 hours

* 8 hours applies to short flights. For longer flights, as for example intercontinental flights, the time is extended to 24 hours

2 Following therapy for DCI, advice should be sought from a diving medical specialist.

The times given below are minimum times

		Minimum time from completion of therapy	
		2000' (600m)	All other flights
2.1	Immediate and complete resolution of symptoms on first recompression	24 hours	48 hours
2.2	Cases without immediate response or with residual symptoms must be decided on an individual basis by a diving medical specialist. Generally wait as long as possible.	Consult a diving medical specialist	

Consideration should be given for 100% oxygen during flight. Following landing, the diver should be assessed by a competent diving doctor.

3 DCI in Flight

- 3.1 Where the diver's symptoms consist only of pain in a limb, he should be treated with analgesics, oral fluids, oxygen if available, and the plane can continue to its destination without diversion or adjustment in altitude.
- 3.2 When the diver has any other symptoms, immediate advice should be sought from a diving medical specialist. It may be necessary to reduce the cabin altitude or divert to the nearest airport. In the meantime, the patient should be given oxygen and oral fluids if available.