

THE METABOLIC SYNDROME: A THREAT FOR BOTH FLIGHT PERSONNEL AND PASSENGERS

LA SYNDROME MÉTABOLIQUE CONSTITUE UNE MENACE POUR LE PERSONNEL NAVIGANT INSI QUE LES PASSAGERS

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Introduction: The Metabolic Syndrome (MS) is represented by the presence of altered glucose / lipid metabolism, hypertension and visceral adiposity in a single individual. It affects one third of the general population and its prevalence steadily increases with age. In an aging society as the one we are living in, a strong association has been found between the MS and the development of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and diabetes mellitus, conditions which negatively influence anybody's quality of life and are also disabling for military aircrew members growing older and older. More broadly, when combined with smoking and aging, the MS is a risk factor for venous and arterial thrombosis, a well-known threat during long-haul flights.

Background: Psychosocial stress – often associated with chronically elevated cortisol levels – and poor nutrition may affect emotional and metabolic components of the MS by various mechanisms eventually leading to steato-hepatitis, male hypo-gonadism, osteopenia, and depression. Sleep deprivation may add to that too and may thus be expected to affect workaholic managers under chronic pressure as well. Moreover, alcohol induced late onset post-meal hypoglycemia may further impair work performance in flight personnel and precipitate cardiovascular events in older travelers.

Discussion: To prevent life-threatening problems during the travel, and reduce the related socioeconomic burden, strong actions should be urgently taken to limit weight gain and identify people at risk for, or affected by the MS. Pilots and flight attendants might be provided with continuous structured nutritional education and regular exercise counseling and monitoring. Extensive and hammering institutional information campaigns might also be addressed to frequent travelers through the media and reinforced at any travel agencies and airport access points. Above all, a proactive attitude should be also promoted among GPs to prevent and efficiently treat the MS as early as possible in all our aging western lifestyle societies.