

Are you afraid of flying?

A WESTJET PILOT ANSWERED COMMON QUESTIONS THAT PLAGUE OUR MINDS WHEN WE CONSIDER FLYING.

Q: Could the pilot lose control while taxiing down the runway during takeoff? What if the plane hits a pothole or a big rock or something? Does this make the plane harder to control or less stable?

A: A pilot WILL NOT lose control over the airplane while taxiing down the taxiway and NEVER lose control while in the Take-Off Roll. We are trained to keep the airplane straight down the runway even when we encounter an engine failure during take-off.

Q: It always feels like during takeoff we are going to fall out of the sky; like we aren't going fast enough. Has this ever happened or could it happen?

A: It WILL NOT happen! The reason for that bottom falling out from under your seat feeling is because we are leaving the earth's gravitational pull. We rotate at pre-calculated speeds for the airplane to SAFELY get airborne. Once airborne we can encounter an engine failure and still keep the airplane flying.

Q: Does engine trouble happen? If one engine dies are you still able to fly to land safely?

A: I have had a few engine failures while operating and MOST if not ALL of the time the passengers WILL NOT even notice that we lost an engine. We practice engine failures on take-off and landings ALL the time. Every six months we go through recurrent training to keep our skills up because engine failures are so RARE in these modern fleets.

Q: How often and thoroughly are the planes checked for safety/mechanical issues?

A: After and before EVERY flight. They also go through A-B-C-D checks. These checks are EXTENSIVE and DETAILED!

Q: I once was in a plane that hit an air pocket during takeoff and it felt like we were dropping out of the sky. Does this damage the plane? Could a wing rip off? Could a plane ever drop out of the sky? What are the air pockets?

A: "Air pockets" is a term allegedly coined by a journalist who rode along on a fight during World War I. It is assumed he was making a general reference to turbulence. Air pockets do not exist at all in the atmosphere, but the expression caught on and is still misused today when referring to turbulence. Flying through rough air (turbulence) isn't much different from driving your car over a rough road or being in a boat in choppy waters.

It may be bumpy, but it doesn't affect our course or altitude unless the pilots request and receive a change of one or both if doing so may reduce the amount of turbulence. Pilots may go to some trouble to give their passengers a smooth ride, but sometimes turbulence is simply unavoidable. An airplane is engineered to withstand extreme stresses...a wing WILL NOT fall off or the airplane WILL NOT fall out of the sky!

Q: What are your thoughts on the plane "fishtailing" especially on descend? This is a very scary feeling!

A: What you experienced was a "Dutch-Roll". Watch this video:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Xk4PuYRujM&feature=related

In simple terms it's like driving on a highway at 120km/hr and opening the right door then the left door and then the right door and then the left door...this will cause drag to one side of the vehicle and it will move to the side that the door is opening and closing.

Q: What is wind shear and is it really the only thing that can cause an accident during landing? Why were there so many stories of planes sliding off runways? Does it happen a lot?

A: Wind shear, sometimes referred to as wind gradient, is a difference in wind speed and direction over a relatively short distance in the atmosphere. Wind shear can be broken down into vertical and horizontal components, with horizontal wind shear seen across weather fronts and near the coast, and vertical shear typically near the surface, though also at higher levels in the atmosphere near upper level jets and frontal zones aloft. If NOT careful and pilots fly through thunderstorms while on approach to landing and they do encounter a MICROBURST (wind shear) it can exceed the limitations of the airplane and cause an accident. BUT with the technological advancements in airplanes we have what is called an EGPWS "Enhanced Ground Proximity Warning System." EGPWS uses aircraft inputs such as position, altitude, air speed and glide-slope, which along with internal terrain, obstacles, and airport databases predict a potential conflict between the aircraft's flight path and terrain or an obstacle.

Q: What do you do in the cockpit after autopilot is on?

A: We back up the onboard computers, fuel calculations, talk to Air Traffic Control, program the on board computers for navigation along our route. Pass on information to our dispatch and other airplanes along our route, and of course talk to our guests and let them know weather and flying conditions en-route and at the destination.

Q: Why are there so many different sounds during the flight if we are travelling at the same altitude and speed? (Not during takeoff or landing)

A: We are traveling through so many atmospheric changes and we actually do change altitudes and speed while en-route. Once in steady level flight the sound should be consistent.

Q: What is the worst thing you've had to handle and did you feel your training prepared you for it?

A: Engine failure, engine fire, on board computer failure, turbulence and YES we were more than trained and handled the situation smoothly and confidently. Most of the time the guests WILL NOT even realize we had an engine failure until the Captain makes an announcement that we are returning to land.

Q: Does the weather matter? What about snowstorms and what if the plane isn't de-iced enough?

A: We carefully plan around inclement weather and with the sophisticated onboard equipment landing in snow storms or reduced visibility is no problem. The airplanes even have an auto-land function. De-icing is VERY important because snow and frost on top of the wing will reduce the wings ability to fly and create lift! It is always de-iced enough.

Q: Sometimes I see people on their electronic devices during takeoff even though they aren't allowed to. Does this affect you? Are these people going to cause the plane to crash?

A: Actually, the rule against electronic devices is for the SAFETY of the guests (so that they pay attention to the briefings and emergency evacuation procedures.) The onboard equipment is shielded against the interference of these types of devices. If they are silly enough not to abide by the regulations it WILL NOT cause the compromise of the vessel.

WORDS OF ADVICE FROM THE PILOT



Step 1: Accept that it is unlikely you can conquer your fear of flying without help.

Step 2: Fear of flying is common. There is help available. Get counselling or join a group.

Step 3: Read a book. Countless books are devoted to overcoming the fear of flying. Most have instruction on relaxation techniques that are helpful. Some are available online as well.

Step 4: Ask your physician for a prescription to relax you when you must fly, if all else fails. Keep in mind, however, that most professionals believe you can conquer this fear without medication.

Step 5: Have confidence that you can succeed. Even the most serious fears about flying can be conquered with proper treatment and hard work!