

The COPA Guide to Getting Back Into Flying

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Why People Quit Flying

There are many, many reasons why people quit flying, probably as many reasons as there are ex-pilots. Some of the most common reasons to quit flying are:

- Learned to fly when young and single, got married, bought a house, had kids; no money and no time for flying
- Medical problems
- Building an airplane, which consumed all spare time and money
- Got bored with flying shortly after finished licence
- Quit flying without even realizing it

Because it is important to realize why you aren't flying let's have a closer look at some of the factors involved in those reasons.

“Got married...Etc” – This is probably the number one reason that COPA members report that they aren't flying. It is a pretty straightforward reason to quit flying. Many

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people learn to fly when they are young; many were Air Cadets who won flying scholarships. Getting married, pursuing a career, having kids and buying a house absorbs just about everyone's time and money. Most people who stop flying in this category really miss flying. Some stay involved peripherally by:

- keeping up their medicals,
- reading magazines
- remaining as COPA members
- going to airshows
- going to fly-in breakfasts
- dropping by the local airport just to watch the planes fly
- talking about flying whenever they get the chance

People in this category often come back to flying with great enthusiasm around age 40-50 when suddenly the kids leave home and the house is paid off. Spousal support is a critical factor. If your spouse supports you getting back into flying then you probably will. The converse is often true as well.

Medical Problems – Pilots who quit flying due to medical problems often stay out of flying. This is unfortunate because many medical problems that grounded people for life years ago are now treatable and some medically grounded pilots can get back to flying. Cardiac problems are a good example – many people are now back flying within a year of having a heart attack with good treatment and some aggressive lifestyle changes, such as weight loss, quitting smoking, getting exercise and improving diet.

Some medical problems do still ground you for life, but even then there are lots of ways to stay flying even without a medical. Many “grounded” pilots are refusing to sell their airplanes and are instead flying with other pilots who have medicals instead. They are making new friends and staying in the air legally!

Building an Airplane – It seems rather ironic that building an airplane often means no more flying, but this situation is usually temporary. One of the biggest culprits here is often “factory estimates” of how many hours and years it will take to build a plane, either from plans or a kit. Some of the factory estimates are quite accurate for a first time builder, but many aren't.

A pilot may buy a kit believing that it will be built in 500 hours and figuring on a year part time. The hours often turn out to be three times the estimate and the years pile up. Before you realize it you haven't flown in five years!

Got Bored... - It seems amazing to hear but many pilots do get bored with flying and quit. Often this happens before they have much more than 100 hours logged.

The culprit here seems to be the way many schools train pilots for their Private Pilot's Licence. Almost the whole time is spent learning and practicing slow flight, touch and goes, stalls and forced landings. Once they get their licence many new pilots rent

aircraft and go right back to the practice area and do those same exercises again – it is all they know about flying. They take friends up flying and show them the same exercises. After 100 hours or so they are bored and flying loses its luster for them. They have done so little training in real multi-leg cross-country flying that they don't travel far from home by plane.

As one flight instructor noted, “When you first get your driver's licence you don't borrow your Dad's car on the weekend and spend all day Saturday practicing parallel parking!”

Airplanes are for going places and if pilots don't learn how to do that with confidence during training the chances of quitting flying are high.

Quit Flying Without Even Realizing It... - This happens to some people. They book a rental airplane for a weekend, but the weather is bad so they rebook for the following weekend and a family emergency comes up. This can go on for months until they suddenly realize that they haven't flown for a year!

The key factor here is that no conscious decision was made to stop flying, it just happened all by itself, one weekend at a time.

Getting Back Into Flying

Getting back into flying can often seem the opposite of smoking. With smoking it can be very hard to quit and easy to get started again. Flying can be very easy to quit. As noted above it can happen without it even being noticed. But getting started again doesn't have to be that intimidating. Just like anything else, it just has to be taken one step at a time. Before you know it you will be flying again.

Probably the biggest factor that brings people back to flying is that they just miss it so much. For those of us who fly, it is part of who we are and “not flying” leaves a hole in our lives that cannot be filled by anything else.

Actually admitting that you aren't flying is an important first step – especially for those pilots who have inadvertently slipped out of flying. Unless you know you have a problem you aren't going to be able to address it!

Once the mortgage is paid off, the financial pressures of having kids at home are past, the medical situation is resolved, the new plane is completed (or sold), or the other factors that kept you out of flying are resolved then it is time to start on the checklist to getting back to flying:

- ✓ Admit that you aren't flying, that it bothers you, and that you want to fly again

- ✓ Get some information regarding what you will need to do – this book is a good start!
- ✓ Renew your medical – if required
- ✓ Regain your Transport Canada recurrency requirements
- ✓ Get a checkout
- ✓ Refresh your knowledge
- ✓ Figure out what aircraft you are going to fly
- ✓ Go flying

The rest of this book will address these items, along with some thoughts on other factors to consider.

Medicals

If you have been out of flying for a number of years you may be surprised to hear that medical validity periods have changed - for the better! This was a COPA initiative that has provided an equivalent level of safety and is currently saving pilots in Canada thousands of dollars.

The Category I Medical: There have been no changes to this “professional licence” level medical. It still validates the *Commercial* and *Airline Transport Pilot Licences*. The validity periods are the same as they have been for many years:

- Under age 40 – 1 year
- Age 40 and over - 6 months

If you hold a *Commercial* or *ATPL* then you may want to start with renewing your Category I medical or you may want to downgrade your licence to save money on the medical requirements. [More on that later on.](#)

Holders of *Commercial* or *ATPL* licences who have Category I medicals may exercise Private Pilot privileges for the same length of time as the Category III medical validity periods, after the Category I period has lapsed.

The Category III Medical: This is the medical that validates the *Private Pilot Licence*.

The new validity periods are:

- Under age 40 – 5 years

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- Age 40 and over – 2 years

This means that as long as your most recent medical was done while you had not yet turned 40 then it is valid for five years, even if you turn 40 during the period of that medical. Obviously it will save you some money to get a fresh medical just before your 40th birthday!

You should also note that the US aviation regulator, the FAA, does now recognize Canadian pilot medicals beyond 24 months. So if you are on a five-year medical you will not need a fresh one to fly in the USA if you are under 40 and beyond two years into your medical. More information on this subject can be found on the [COPA website](#).

The Category IV Medical: This is the medical that validates the *Pilot Permit - Recreational Aeroplanes* and the *Pilot Permit – Ultra-light Aeroplanes*. It is slightly different in both cases.

The holders of *PP-Rec* merely read the [Category IV declaration statement](#) and then sign it. Your family doctor countersigns it and you send it into Transport Canada. You will receive your Medical Certificate in the mail. It will be valid for:

- Under age 40 – 5 years
- Age 40 or over – 2 years

The Category IV medical that validates the *PP-UL* is a self-declaration that is identical to that which validates the *PP-Rec*, except that the family doctor's signature is not required. The validity period is:

- All ages – 5 years

It is worth noting that many people think that the medical standard for the Category IV medical is much lower than that of the Cat III and that if you can't qualify for a Cat III you should be able to get a Cat IV. This isn't necessarily the case. The standards for the Cat IV are slightly different, but most of the medical conditions that disqualify a pilot for the Cat III are also Cat IV disqualifying. The Cat IV medical self-declaration requires an applicant to certify that they have never had any of a number of medical problems. If they answer "yes" to any then they have to meet the Cat III standard by seeing a Civil Aviation Medical Examiner (CAME), for further investigation.

Getting a Medical Certificate: To get a fresh Category I or III medical you will need to see a CAME or what we used to call an "MOT Doctor". As always, there are many physicians around Canada and in other countries who have undergone the training and are designated by TC as CAMEs. They are easy to locate as TC keeps a complete interactive database listing all CAMEs, their addresses and phone numbers, on the Internet at:

http://www.tc.gc.ca/aviation/applications/cam/en/camsearch.asp?x_lang=e.

There you can search by location to find a CAME near you.

CAMEs set their own fee schedules but currently you can expect to pay \$100-150 for a Cat III medical, plus any tests, like an ECG, that are required. The Cat III medical requires an ECG for applicants over age 40 every four years, normally.

The New “Medical Certificates”: The document that validated your licence used to be called a “Licence Validation Certificate”, although many people referred to it as a medical certificate. Today it is officially called a “medical certificate”!

One big change is that the CAME can stamp the back and the certificate is valid for the whole period of the medical – no more waiting for TC to send you a new certificate. This was a COPA initiative to streamline medical processing.

Recency & Recurrency

Once you have your medical back the next thing to think about is TC’s “recency and recurrency requirements”. These were introduced in 1996 to ensure that pilots had some degree of recent exposure to flying to enhance safety.

The requirements can be found in [CAR 401.05](#) and the associated [CAR Standard 421.05](#).

Basically there are five-year recency and two year recurrent training requirements.

Five Year Recency: The five year requirement says that no pilot can exercise the privileges of the permit, licence or rating unless they have acted as pilot-in-command or co-pilot of an aircraft within the five years preceding the flight, unless they have completed a flight review with an instructor within the previous 12 months and completed the PSTAR pre-solo written exam. The flight review must include all the flight test skill requirements, so if you haven’t flown for five years you are basically redoing the flight test and the written solo exam requirements. This may require some extra dual to get you up to the needed standard to pass the flight review and will certainly require some study to pass the written exam.

Needless to say, if at all possible, pilots should fly at least once every five years to avoid this requirement!

Note that the statement that allows you to have acted as a “copilot” must be on an aircraft that requires two pilots to be operated on its type certificate. You cannot have logged co-pilot time on a Cessna 172 or other light aircraft.

You can note that the requirement is to have been pilot in command or co-pilot of “an aircraft”. It does not have to be the same class or type. In fact having flown a helicopter or even a hang glider or airship four years previously will allow you fly again without completing the flight review.

Two Year Recurrency: This one is simple – all pilots must complete a recurrency training program within 24 months previous to any flight. There is a lot of flexibility as to what is an acceptable recurrency training program and the CAR Standard 421.05 details what can qualify:

- completion of a flight review conducted by the holder of a flight instructor rating in the same category, including all items normally covered during the flight test for the issue of that permit or licence
- attendance at a safety seminar conducted by Transport Canada Aviation
- successful completion of a recurrent training program designed to update pilot knowledge, which could include subject areas such as human factors, meteorology, flight planning and navigation, and aviation regulations, rules and procedures that has been approved by the Minister as being satisfactory for those purposes. (these are often run by COPA Flights or flying clubs)
- completion of the self-paced study program produced annually in the *Transport Canada Aviation Safety Newsletter*. The completed copy shall be the most current published by date and shall be retained by the licence holder. This is also published in *COPA Flight* each fall and is available all year round on the [COPA website](#).
- completion of a training program or Pilot Proficiency Check as required by CARs Parts IV (Flight Training schools), Part VI (Private Operator Certificate holders, like corporate flight departments) or VII (Commercial operators) of the *Canadian Aviation Regulations*
- completion of the skill (flight test) requirements for issue or renewal of a pilot permit, licence or rating, including night rating, VFR over-the-top rating, instrument rating, multi-engine class rating, flight instructor rating, landplane or seaplane rating
- completion of the written examination(s) for a permit, licence or rating.

Carrying Passengers: To carry passengers you must have completed five take-offs and landings within the past six months, by day or night as appropriate. Night take-offs and landings qualify you for passenger carrying day and night, but day take-offs and landings only qualify you for day passenger carrying.

Have a look at the full text of [CAR 401.05](#) and the [CAR Standard 421.05](#) for complete details.

Checkouts

Beyond the requirements of the CARs as stated above, you will need a checkout if you haven't flown in some time. Legally, as long as you have flown as PIC of any aircraft within 5 years and have written the self-paced study program within two years you could jump into any light aircraft and fly it, but it wouldn't be smart and may not be safe to do so.

If you haven't flown in a while you need some dual with an experienced pilot or perhaps with an instructor to get your skills and thought processes working right again. Flying is a skill that deteriorates with time and some practice is required before you let yourself loose in the skies on your own again.

How much time will it take? It will depend on many factors:

- How much time since you last flew
- Your total flying time
- Your time on that aircraft type
- Your age
- Your motivation
- How much studying you have done to prepare
- Many other factors

The key is to be prepared to do it right and spend some time flying with someone knowledgeable until you are comfortable and safe again.

Knowledge

Flying is not only a “skill-based” activity; it is also a “knowledge-based” activity. When you first learned to fly you studied hard to pass the written exams. If you haven't flown for a while much of that knowledge will have been forgotten. Humans just tend to forget things that they don't use everyday. Get into the books and review:

- **Ground school subjects**, including:
 - ✓ **Meteorology** – Thunderstorms haven't changed much in the past 30 years, but if you are still thinking SAs, FTs and FAs then your knowledge is older than you think - they are long gone, replaced by METARs, TAFs and graphical GFAs. We even have plain text (no codes) weather now! Now that is easy!
 - ✓ **Aerodynamics** – There are some new airplane shapes in the skies that would be interesting to learn about!

- ✓ **Airframes** – Many new aircraft are made of new materials, like fibreglass, Kevlar, graphite and other composites.
- ✓ **Engines** – These have changed with fuel injection, diesels and two-strokes powering some newer aircraft.
- ✓ **Navigation** – If the latest thing you learned the first time was “Radio Range” start thinking about the new world of GPS – easy to learn and very efficient – pilots don’t get lost like they used to!
- ✓ **Air Traffic Control and Flight Service Stations** - If you have been out of flying for a while you may not know that Canadian ATC and FSS are now run by a private company, [Nav Canada](#). Most of the procedures are the same, but some things are better and some aren’t!
- ✓ **Airmanship** – this is where knowledge often gets the most rusty – do you remember how to tie-down an aircraft properly. Did you know that there is no more red or green avgas? It is all blue (for now!) Lots to review here!
- ✓ **Canadian Aviation Regulations** – if you last remember *The Air Regs* and *Air Navigation Orders* then you likely haven’t been flying since October 10th, 1996. That is when we got the CARs. The new rules are thicker than the old ones, but somewhat better organized and generally easier to read. They are also cheaper to get than buying the old binders full of Air Regs and ANOs. No more amendments to do either! The new CARs are available to everyone for free on the [Transport Canada website](#) and the government amends them for you twice a year in June and December!

Another great source of information is the new *Aeronautical Information Manual* (AIM) which replaced the venerable AIP in 2005. This publication is also available to read on the [Transport Canada website](#) or for download as an [Adobe Acrobat document](#). It is also available [on paper](#) from TC too.

There is always a lot to learn in flying, but if you have been out of it for a while you will find that there are lots of exciting things happening to catch up on. Many people find that is one of the most interesting parts – most of the recent changes are for the better.

What Are You Going To Fly?

If you have been out of flying for some years because you have been building your own plane then you may already have the answer to this question – if it is finished! Others who come back to flying may be looking for an aircraft to fly. Here are some of the options in today’s flying world:

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Renting from a school or club – Renting an airplane from a flying club or flying school remains the way about 25% of recreational pilots fly in Canada. It can make good sense if you live near a school and fly less than about 35 hours a year. It is also a great way to get back into flying without having to invest a lot of money up front.

Private aircraft – Many owners make their own aircraft available to other pilots to use for an hourly fee. This can make a lot of sense if you want to fly something other than the school standard aircraft. Very few schools have Cessna 182s, Mooneys, Lancairs, Buckeye powered parachutes or Beech Bonanzas! Check at your local airport for owners who do this.

Buy a plane – This is still a great option and many pilots still own their own plane by themselves. Certified aircraft are still very common in Canada and many older and interesting aircraft can be purchased for a reasonable price. For lots more information read the new [*COPA Guide to Buying an Aircraft*](#), available to COPA members for free on the COPA website. The [*COPA Guide to Certified Aircraft*](#) will give you some background on owning an aircraft in that category.

Build your own amateur-built plane – Amateur-builts are becoming very popular in Canada as they often offer the most performance for the buck. If you do not have the time or inclination to build one there is a good used market in amateur builts. Thanks to a COPA initiative, used amateur-builts may now be imported from other countries including the USA, provided that they have 100 hours total time on them. Have a look at [*The COPA Guide to Amateur-Builts*](#) for more information on this subject.

Build your own ultralight – Ultralights are the most popular category of uncertified aircraft in Canada and their numbers are growing quickly. The reasons are simple – they are cheaper than other aircraft to buy and operate and most pilots find them more fun, too. Basic and advanced ultralights can be built from kits, purchased new complete or purchased used. Basic ultralights can also be built from plans. Ultralights come in many different shapes, sizes and speeds, from sedate open cockpit aircraft to cross country speedsters. Have a look at [*The COPA Guide to Ultralights*](#) for more information on this subject.

Partner on a Plane – Partnerships are becoming much more common in Canada in recent years. The reasons are basic – the aircraft gets used more and the fixed costs are spread around more people, making partnering cheaper than owning on your own. [*The COPA Guide to Buying an Aircraft*](#) has lots of information of partnerships, including sample partnership agreements. It is available to COPA members for free on the COPA website.

There are lots of ways to get back into flying these days in addition to those mentioned above. Having no money at all doesn't even mean that you can't fly! Many pilots have teamed with pilots who have lost their medicals but who own airplanes. Have

a look at www.pilotpartner.com for more information on finding a flying partner. There are lots of creative ways to keep flying!

Clubs

Flying clubs are becoming more common in Canada. The local chapters of COPA are called COPA Flights and they have been spreading rapidly throughout the country in recent years. COPA now has about 116 active Flights. Pilots are finding good reasons to band together – to help keep airports open, to connect with other pilots, to fly [Young Eagles](#) and to participate in fly-out trips and social events.

In addition to the COPA Flights many other organizations, such as EAA, RAA and UPAC have local chapters. There are also many local flying clubs these days. It is a great advantage to a pilot returning to aviation to join one of these organizations. They provide much practical information and connect you with expertise ranging from aircraft homebuilding to planning multi-aircraft long distance flights to Mexico. They also provide a good measure of comradery and support for the returning pilot. They will help get you started and keep you motivated to stay in flying.

You can find a complete list of [COPA Flights](#) on the COPA website.

Downgrading Your Licence

It may seem like an odd thing to do when getting back into flying, but sometimes “downgrading” your licence makes sense.

Let’s say that you have a commercial licence, but just intend to fly recreationally in simple non-high performance aircraft with no more than one passenger. You don’t need the commercial licence for that and if you are 40 or over you will need to pay for a complete commercial medical every six months.

You could get a commercial Cat I medical and then have your commercial privileges for six months and exercise private privileges for another 18 months, with two years between Cat I medicals.

You also qualify for the issue of a *Pilot Permit – Recreational Aeroplanes*, by simply applying for it at any [Transport Canada Centre](#). The main difference is the medical requirements. The *PP-Rec* is validated by a Cat IV medical, which is a self-declaration, countersigned by your family doctor. It is valid:

- Under age 40 – 5 years
- Age 40 or over – 2 years

Since a commercial medical every six months (for pilots over 40) could cost \$150 per exam, over the two-year validity of the Cat IV medical certificate it could save you \$600! That is quite a bit of money that you could use for some actual flying!

What Is It All Going To Cost?

While you have been away from flying you may have heard that it has become more expensive. To some extent that is true – prices in flying have gone up beyond the rate of inflation. Here are some current (2006) prices to look out for:

- Flying Club Rental Cessna 150, one hour, wet, solo - \$105
- Avgas 100LL (blue) \$1.27 per litre
- New Visual Navigation chart – \$14.95
- Canada Flight Supplement (replaces the old VFR and IFR Supps) \$15.95
- Nav Canada Air Navigation Service fee (all aircraft over 1328 lbs, except gliders ultralights and balloons) per year \$72 (as of March 2005)

There are some good news stories though! Some things in aviation are still pretty reasonably priced and affordable (Summer of 2006 prices). Used aircraft are getting darn right cheap these days due to the falling US dollar. For instance:

- Used 1974 model Cessna 172 in average condition \$45,000 (these have really dropped recently due to the US dollar situation)
- Brand new Challenger II two place ultralight kit, complete with zero time Rotax 503 engine \$24,750
- Auto fuel (useable in most ultralights, amateur-builts and many certified aircraft) \$0.99 per litre
- \$1,000,000 Liability Insurance for a year (through COPA's Silver Wings insurance program) \$199 - see the [COPA website](#) for more details on insurance!
- Total cost per hour to operate a basic ultralight aircraft - \$30.00
- Total cost per hour to operate a Cessna 150 (in a partnership with four other people, flying 50 hours per year each) - \$57

Flying does cost some money to get back into, but with some care it doesn't have to break your budget. There are lots of ways to fly affordably, even today.

More Information

In recent years the Internet has become a great source of information on aviation. For more information on getting back into flying have a look at:

- COPA website www.copanational.org - 1500 pages of indispensable information on all aspects of powered flying and more.
- Transport Canada Civil Aviation website <http://www.tc.gc.ca/CivilAviation/menu.htm> - the CARs, “How do I...” Guides and much more.

Last Words

What are you waiting for? Let's go flying!

