

A Day in the Life of a.. **PILOT**

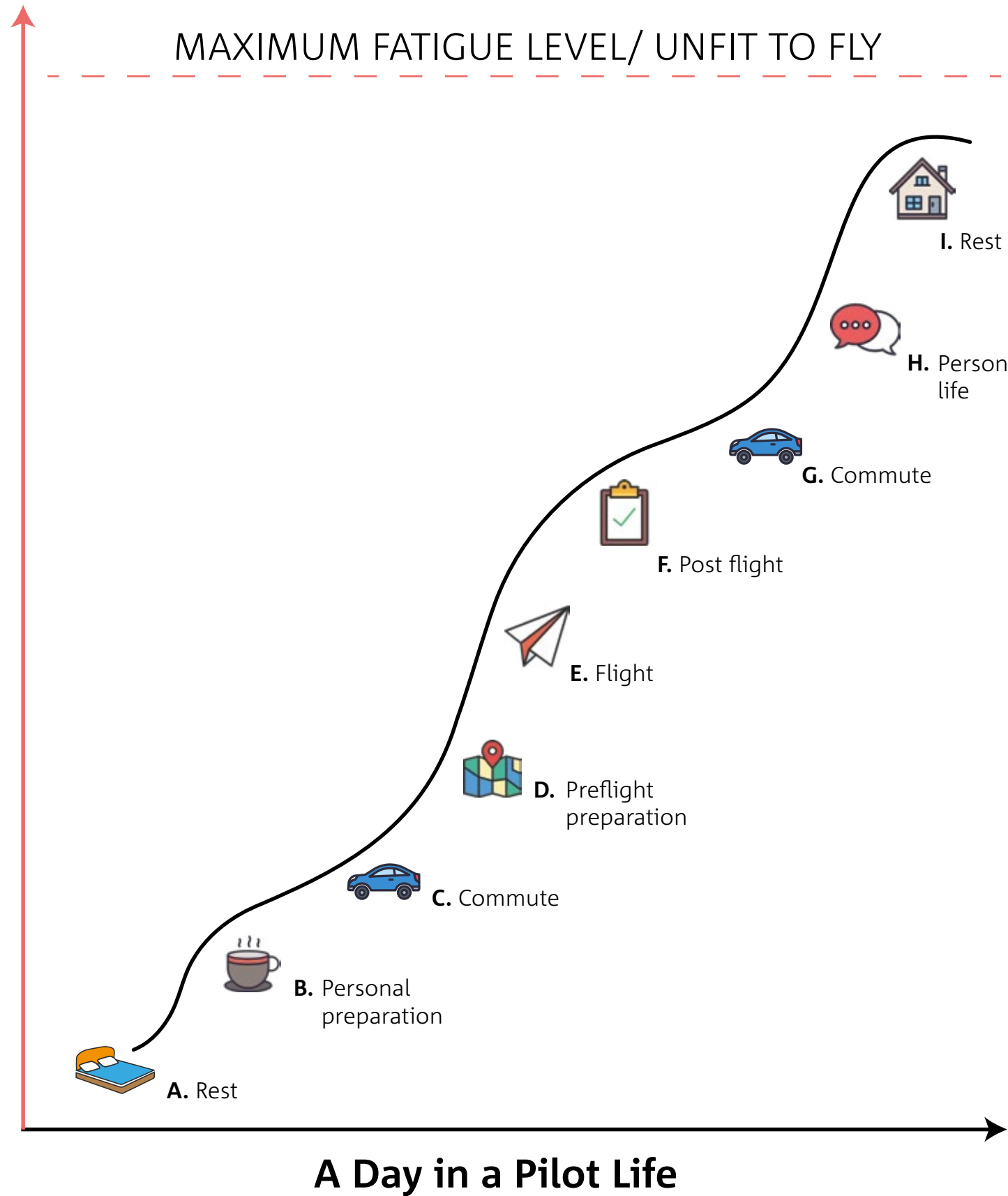
These are really difficult times for everyone. Large numbers of us are reconsidering our career paths after being laid off or staying at home furloughed, if you are in that situation then take a look at our Wellbeing and Career support material <https://www.easa.europa.eu/community/content/managing-impact-your-career>.

For those airline crew who are still continuing to keep the world turning, braving the odds together with passengers (hopefully in ever increasing numbers), this article was created to provide you with some ideas good habits that can help you survive the daily routine of a pilot in these challenging times. These are based on my own experiences but everyone is different so please share you own thoughts, ideas and experiences. I'll be only too happy to hear from you!

If you aren't a pilot, don't just skip past this article – the more we can appreciate the challenges we face in our different roles, the more we can appreciate how we can work together to make our industry better.

This “A Day in the Life...” series will give an interesting insight into the daily life of a pilot and we are looking forward to following up with others very soon.





 **A. Rest**

Take a moment to assess if you are fit enough to perform your duty until the end.

As a pilot we are all familiar with flight time limitations and how much rest we are required to have. These regulations have been made to ensure a minimum rest for a pilot when making a crew roster. The times in this regulation are based on data from the industry and a subsequent risk assessment. What does this mean? That each pilot as an individual should be able to have enough rest, but circumstances may require more rest. Just think about a stressful personal situation keeping you awake because you think about it all the time. That is why before you decide to do your flight, you need to take a moment to assess if you are fit enough to perform the whole duty.

Ensure a proper rest, not to be disturbed by external influences.

Everybody goes to sleep in their own way. Some can go to sleep in a second wherever they are. Some need total silence and darkness and so on. Before going to sleep ensure your room is arranged to your specific needs. Your mobile phone should be put on silent with an alarm set for waking up (on time). Or you can be woken up like me in the beginning by your drunk friends who are having a blast and want to inform you about it. Oh, and when you are in a hotel and they are doing construction work next door. Don't stay in your bed getting mad about it, but take 10 minutes to ask and go to a different room. Or ask them to stop.

Take a moment to ease your mind.

Before going to sleep I spend some minutes focussing on my breathing, clearing my mind. Any doctor will tell you focussing on breathing helps the lungs inhale and exhale at the same pace as the heart and thus become calmer. Another thing I like to do is meditation. It only has to take a couple of minutes, but it will help. Think of a calm place and focus completely on your body and relaxing it. Going to the gym is also an option to clear your mind. As my mother always says for stress relief, don't think too much, but be active (the literal translation from Dutch: 'out of your mind, into your body'). When you go to exercise your body is in an active mode, so you will need some time as well to get your body into a resting mode.

Have a look at this great link for breathing techniques or meditation:

<https://www.flightsafetyaustralia.com/2019/05/its-all-in-the-mind/>

for personal wellbeing in general have a look at:

<https://flightsafety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guide-to-Wellbeing.pdf>





B. Personal preparation

When reporting time is later on the day, consider your fatigue level when spending time on your social life.

You woke up. Hopefully you had a good rest and have decided that you are fit to do your duty. Depending on your reporting time you may spend time on your social life. If you spend time on your social life, consider your fatigue level when reporting for duty. In the morning you are invited by your friends to go on a boat trip. After the boat trip lunch is planned, followed by a pub visit in the city. You need to decide before, if after that you still are fit enough to do that 15 hour duty.

Plan time for your flight preparation, for example before you leave to commute.

I usually prepare the flight on board my flight towards my base. It is a 45 minute flight which is enough to do my initial preparation. The rest I can do after landing. I normally plan to land 1 to 2 hours before reporting time. Another perfect time is before you set off to commute (if you can't prepare during it). In the end effective time management is paramount. You don't want to quickly scan through the flight plan and hope you know it good enough.

Spend time on your personal life.

As a long-haul pilot I am away from home a lot. Whether you have a family or a relationship they notice our absence the same we all do when away. On the day you are preparing, put aside enough time for them. This very personal and I would not dare to tell you what you should do. But in my case I make sure they know I am aware of what they will be doing while I am gone, I will call them after landing. They always support me in every way and that's something money can't buy. Especially in these hard times we are all living! Oh, and if you are not in a relationship or have a family of your own, bid farewell to your dog, cat, goldfish, car or motorbike, if that is what you are looking forward to come back to and keep safe. I guess you get my point by now!



C. Commute

When an airline has commuting crew, invest in a resting area for crew.

Commuting can take up a lot of time, especially now with COVID measures. Some pilots need to go to an airport first, catch a flight and after landing at their base, report for duty. You may arrive hours ahead of reporting time.

What do you do in the meantime? Wait in the lounge, have dinner, lunch, breakfast? For companies having commuting crew it would be a very good investment to arrange a room with full reclining chairs for pilots to rest. My airline does not provide this, but we have some good deals with airport hotels where I can rent a room for a good price.

Plan your commuting carefully.

To get from your home to your base, you have several ways of transport. If you live close by, it's easy to take the car. If you live in another country, like me, it's more complex. I invest some time to think about my commuting options. Writing down option A (and booking it), B and C. After a while you know all the options on each day. That is good because there will come a time that you need that alternative. And it is much more relaxing if you have that option ready.

An example: after An SFO-LGW flight, my flight to AMS was cancelled. All flights were cancelled. Radar issues. The first thing I did was book a hotel. My back up plan had started. I was creating alternatives. I booked the hotel for a good price. Half an hour later all hotels were fully booked as passengers got stranded. After booking my hotel, I started to look at my alternatives. Fly from another airport was too expensive already. Second means of transport was by train. I found a ticket with an acceptable price for the next morning. I was looking forward to going home, as my normal plan was: take the flight home, sleep some. Repack, go on holiday with my family. This ended up in sleeping in a hotel, a long journey sleeping on board the train, going on holiday a day later as planned. Get ready for worse things to happen in your career.

Want to know all the details on operational guidelines for management of passengers?

https://www.easa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dfu/EASAECD_Covid-19_Operational%20guidelines%20for%20management%20of%20passengers_v2.pdf





D. Preflight preparation

Re-evaluate if you are mentally and physically fit to perform your duty.

As I meet with the crew, I discuss the flight plan, weather, notams etc. At some companies you do this at the office, we do the briefing on the airplane or even enroute to the airplane. We divide tasks, Pilot flying sets up the cockpit, the pilot monitoring does the walk around. Pilot's often say that they want to start with a coffee first.. But ask yourself this, why do you need coffee? You were fit to do the duty, right? I know coffee is a socially established thing to drink. But you shouldn't need caffeine to perform your duty ;-).

During the pre flight preparation I spend time to re-evaluate if I am mentally and physically fit to perform my duty. Something may well have happened at home which distracts me mentally, like my son being sick. I have a look next to me, how is my colleague doing.

Unless it is one of your first line training flights, you always have time to joke around. I always use that time to joke around, but also to think about how I feel and ask how my colleagues are doing. We can talk about our hobbies during cruise.

COVID-19.

COVID has changed flying. New issues are a part of our flight preparation. Have a look at this publication of EASA to know the latest safety issues: https://www.easa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dfu/review_of_aviation_safety_issues_from_covid-19_final_0.pdf

Some example by from this publication:

1. Prevention and treatment of unruly passengers in the context of COVID-19.
2. Personnel may not feel safe and in control about returning to work.
3. Decreased wellbeing of aviation professionals during shutdown.
4. Aviation p ersonnel fatigue.
5. Flight crew fatigue due to unavailability of rest facilities at destination or extended duty period.
6. Personnel no longer working collaboratively.
7. Reduced adherence to procedures in the new working environment.
8. Roster adaption to reduce transmissions of illness may create different team behaviors.

Ensure a common mindset for the executing of the flight.

A part of the pre flight preparation is checking the set up of the cockpit (FMS, etc) and doing the briefings. Briefing is an important part of the pre flight. It establishes a common mind set for the departure route. I take time to do this properly. Making sure by asking questions that my colleague understands what I have in mind. This helps preventing surprises later on.



E. Flight

Take a breath after a busy part of the flight.

Time for pushback and start up! This is the start of a busy period. Taxiing, take off and climb. Jokes are put aside and we go to work. Although physically you are not busy very much you will be mentally. Imagine that busy airport with a lot of traffic and ATC that is hard to follow. This is where we excel and were tested for. Somewhere during the climb you can feel the busy time easing off. This is a perfect time to sit back a bit (not too much as you are still flying the airplane). But take a moment to relax. At this time you go through all the options in case of an emergency, and have a sip of your drink.

Stay hydrated and plan your meals.

On a short haul flight you may be already busy with preparing the approach after levelling of or even before. It is a good idea to plan your meal or drink if your are flying when it is normally dinner time. Flying an approach hungry is distracting. When flying those short sectors it is easier to plan to have your meal in between the sectors when on the ground. As pilots we eat our meal very quickly. However it is much healthier to eat your meal slowly, even if is airplane food... Food not chewed well makes you feel drowsy and hence sleepy since more blood is required to finish the digestion process in your stomach and that is deprived from your head. Staying hydrated is important as we all know. I only ask for bottles of water, I usually down 2 before take off! So ensure you get used to drinking. A bottle of water is easy to get from the cabin crew.

Agree upon the rest schedule for long haul flights well before.

On a long haul flight there is more time. The cruise part may vary from a couple of hours to over 10 hours. Even some short haul flights have enough time during cruise for meals etc. The shorter the flight the higher the stress level can be. For the long haul flights I fly we often have an additional crew member which makes it possible for actual resting in the bunk instead of the controlled rest in the flight deck. Controlled rest is limited to a short amount of time. A good practise on long haul flights is to agree upon the rest schedule early on. This gives the crew the opportunity to plan their rest at home or at layover, resulting in a better use of the rest onboard. Consider this: if you just woke up to report for duty followed by the first rest on an 15 hour flight, you won't sleep much and the last part of the flight you find yourself approaching your fatigue limit.





F. Post flight

Take five minutes to properly finish the post-flight documentation and to discuss the flight.

After the parking brake has been set and all checklists have been done, it is time for paperwork. Or nowadays, complete the digital log on your EFB. While I am tired, I take a minute to correctly fill in all the details. Most documentation errors are made during post flight. My mind is set to go home, or to the hotel for that well deserved drink. But it is better to take 5 minutes to finish that admin properly than to have in your mind that you forgot something. Take another minute to discuss the flight. Think of:

- Was the flight executed as planned?
- Were there any deviations?
- Anything worthwhile reporting to the safety department?
- Anything about your knowledge that needs refreshing?

Before leaving the aircraft make sure its tidy and ready for the next crew.

Before I leave the cockpit, I make sure it is tidy and have a look around if I did not forget my sunglasses. It is a small thing to do but there is nothing worse than stepping into a filthy cockpit when starting a 16 hour duty.

Take a couple of minutes to say goodbye/ thank you to your crew.

After all is finished it is time to go! Either home or to the hotel with the crew. Before I rush to catch my flight I take a moment to say goodbye to my colleagues. Ask how their flight was and what they have planned the coming days. Its a little thing but an important gesture to establish that good working culture in your company. It never hurts to be nice. And if you are on layover, do it before falling asleep on the hotel shuttle.



G. Commute

Ask yourself, am I fit enough to drive home.

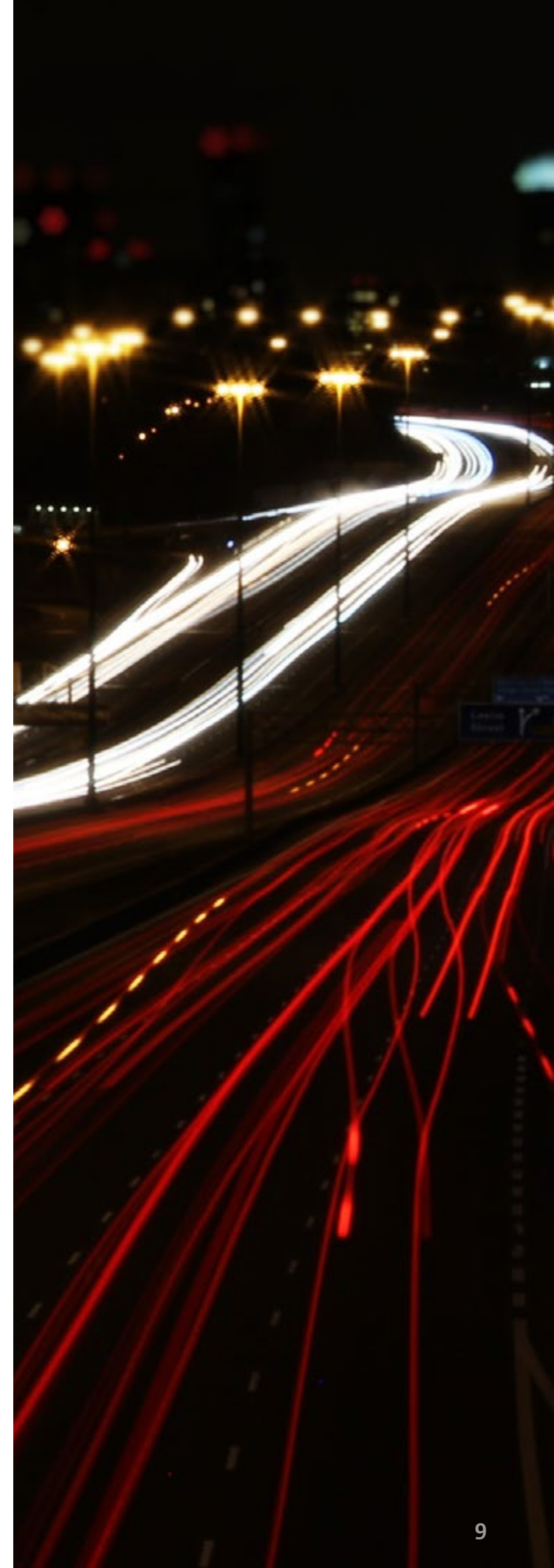
When I go home after a long duty I know how tired I can be. We all know the picture of a sleeping crew member on his/her way home, either in the train or a plane. I luckily have no pictures of a crewmember sleeping behind the steering wheel of his/her car. Now I remember why I asked myself if I was fit to perform this duty. I can sleep on my flight home. I wouldn't be driving straight after this duty! And its so easy. I have been there as well. I had to stop the car because I was just too tired to sleep. So before driving, at least ask yourself, am I fit enough to do it?

It may prove to be better to take a later flight home and sleep first.

I commute a lot and find myself waiting on the airport a lot. I often get a day room after the flight. Again, it is worthwhile to arrange deals with hotels. Nowadays there are also airport hotels where you can rent a room for a couple of hours. It may prove to be better to take a later flight home and sleep first. Especially if you have to drive home after landing.

A stable and fixed roster helps commuting crew to plan their travels.

Commuting pilots can find themselves thinking they could start a travel agency if their roster changes a lot. Next to it costing a lot of money, it will also cost a lot of time to arrange the commuting. Airlines help commuting pilots if they have a fixed roster. This way crew can plan their commuting ahead. All crew knows in aviation things can change rapidly, but a roster should be as stable as possible.





H. Personal life

Sometimes you have to say no to dinner and drinks.

Finally ...home! Whether still with some strength in you or totally exhausted, you are greeted by your dog, cat...goldfish, flat mates, the postman... you name it!. My kids jump on me as soon as I get off the car. My wife gives me a rundown of all the things that happened in my absence and tells me she wants to go to that Swedish furniture big store (that hardly anyone has heard of!) precisely that same afternoon and redecorate the kids' rooms by tomorrow. Ahhh!!! Isn't it great to be back home!. But I know soon I will go back flying and start the journey once more. But hey!. School holidays are coming up soon and perhaps this time they can come with me too!. This is one of the luxuries this job has. I know this trip will be special and is for this reason I look after myself with more dedication.

Get the balance right between rest and social life.

The difficult part is creating a good balance between rest and enough attention to your social life. This means family and friends. You alone can decide what is enough. Of course you can take opinions of somebody else into consideration, but if they are not in the same business their perspective is very much different and therefore have a different opinion that does not help you.

"Sorry I can't come, I have to fly tomorrow.."

"AHHH, Why are you so boring, just come to the party! That flight is ages away"



I. Rest

We are back where we started. It is time to rest for your next duty. Also when having a day off tomorrow. Take your time to rest well. Every good rest helps your body recover and mind.