

toxic free airlines ←

Toxic Free Airlines
18 Hillford Place
Redhill
Surrey
RH1 5AU

dee@toxicfreeairlines.com
www.toxicfreeairlines.com

CREW HEALTH SURVEY

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In March 2009 Toxic Free Airlines started an online health survey in a bid to find out if there is a crew health problem. This survey will remain open indefinitely to all serving pilots and cabin crew worldwide and will be updated regularly.

910 surveys have been received:

21 pilots

889 cabin crew

Surveys have come from: Australia, Ireland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain, UK & USA

The average age of those who took part was 40

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Summary

Out of **910 surveys** received the number of crew with no symptoms or sick leave in the previous 12 months was 16

231 (25%) had no time off sick
679 (74%) had some time off sick
208 (22%) had long term sickness of 3 weeks+

Many crew who had not reported sick told us they were ill on their days off / leave / part time weeks. Others said they went to work when they weren't 100% fit because they were afraid of the consequences of taking time off.

These are some of the conditions crew told us they had been diagnosed with:

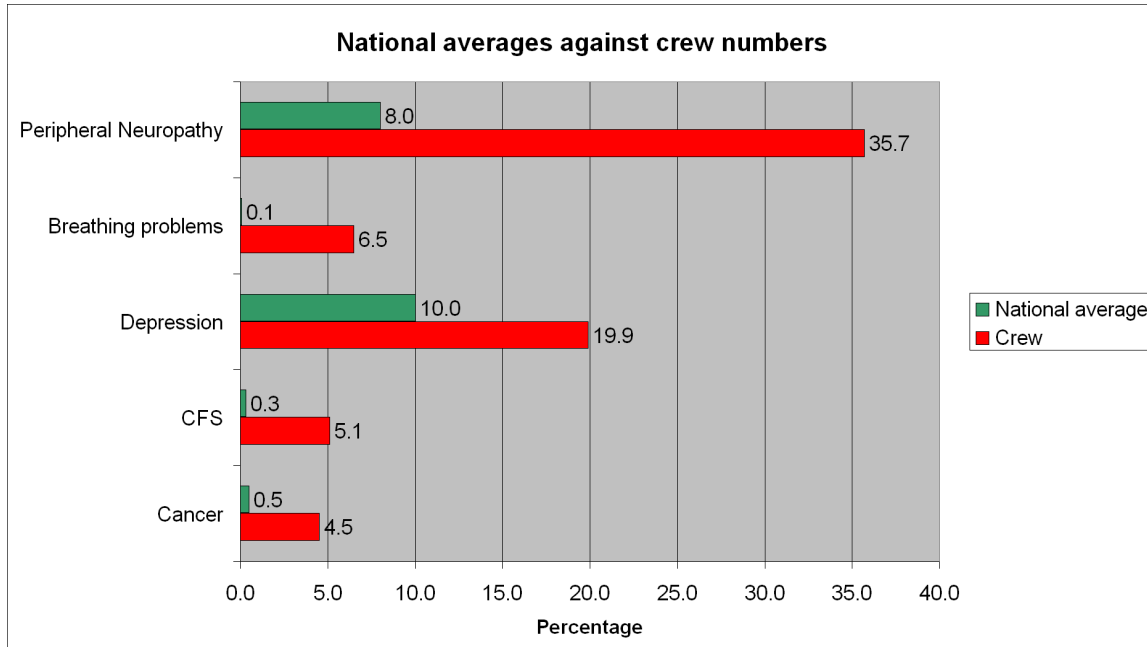
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|--------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Depression | 181 | 19.9% |
| Irritable bowel syndrome | 123 | 13.5% |
| High blood pressure | 110 | 12.1% |
| Asthma | 65 | 7.1% |
| Pneumonia/bronchitis | 59 | 6.5% |
| Chronic fatigue | 46 | 5.1% |
| Cancer* | 41 | 4.5% |
| Thyroid disorder | 39 | 4.3% |

*This figure does not include those with pre-cancerous cells or those who did not specify if their tumour was malignant.

Crew also told us they had been diagnosed with other conditions not listed on the survey. These included: pituitary tumour, brain tumours, endometriosis, osteoporosis, bipolar disorder, diabetes and 2 cases of sarcoidosis . The British Lung Foundation advises the usual incidence of this in the UK is 1 in 10,000. The most frequently mentioned other illnesses were colds & flu, infections, panic attacks, nose & sinus problems and vertigo.

National averages

As a comparison Toxic Free Airlines looked at UK national average figures.



Sources:

Cancer Research says the chance of getting any cancer aged 35-44 is **1 in 200**

ME Research UK says the incidence of CFS is up to 150,000 which is **1 in 400**

Mental Health Foundation says every year **1 in 10** will suffer from some form of depression.

Health & Safety Executive figures for 2008/09 state an estimated incidence of breathing or lung problems for people working in the last 12 months to be 64 per 100,000 or 0.064%

The Medifocus Guidebook on Peripheral Neuropathy states that the prevalence of peripheral neuropathy worldwide has been estimated to range from 2% - 8% of the population. (35.7% of crew reported numbness and/or pins & needles in the face, hands and feet).

Toxic Free Airlines comment

Having read all **900+ surveys**, there is no doubt in our minds that the crew health problem is real and very serious. Not only is crew health being affected but also flight safety. Both cabin crew and pilots say they are having difficulty performing their duties. 44% said they suffered from confusion and difficulty thinking, 53% said they had difficulty concentrating. These people were considered 'A1 fit to fly' when they were accepted for the job. If they are being affected to this extent then passengers, who include babies, children, pregnant women, the elderly and those recovering from illness must also be at risk of health effects.

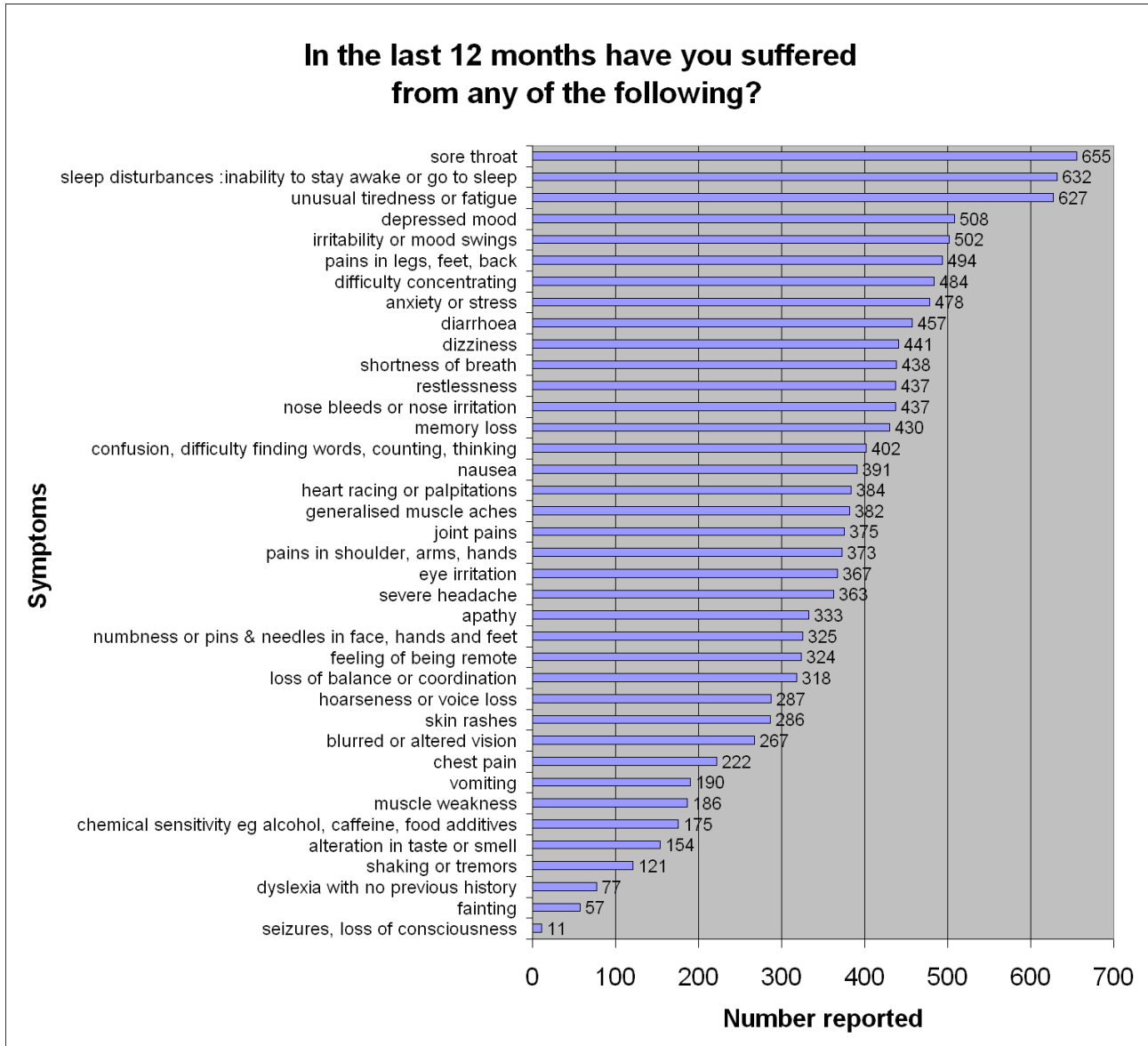
All original survey forms are in the Toxic Free Airlines office and can be made available for viewing and verification.

Grateful thanks to all the crew who have completed surveys for giving us this personal information and also to our colleagues at the Aerotoxic Association for their help in compiling this data.

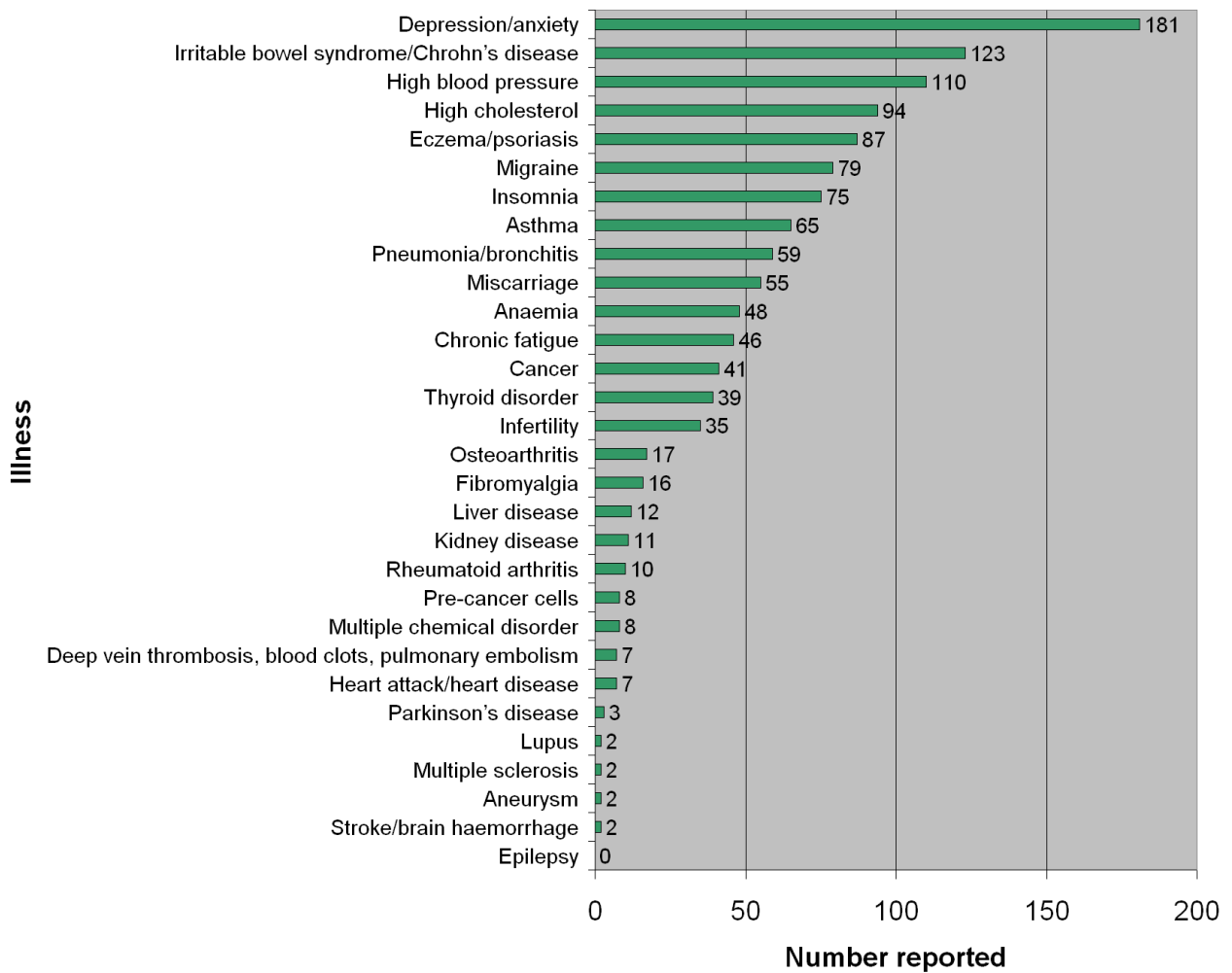
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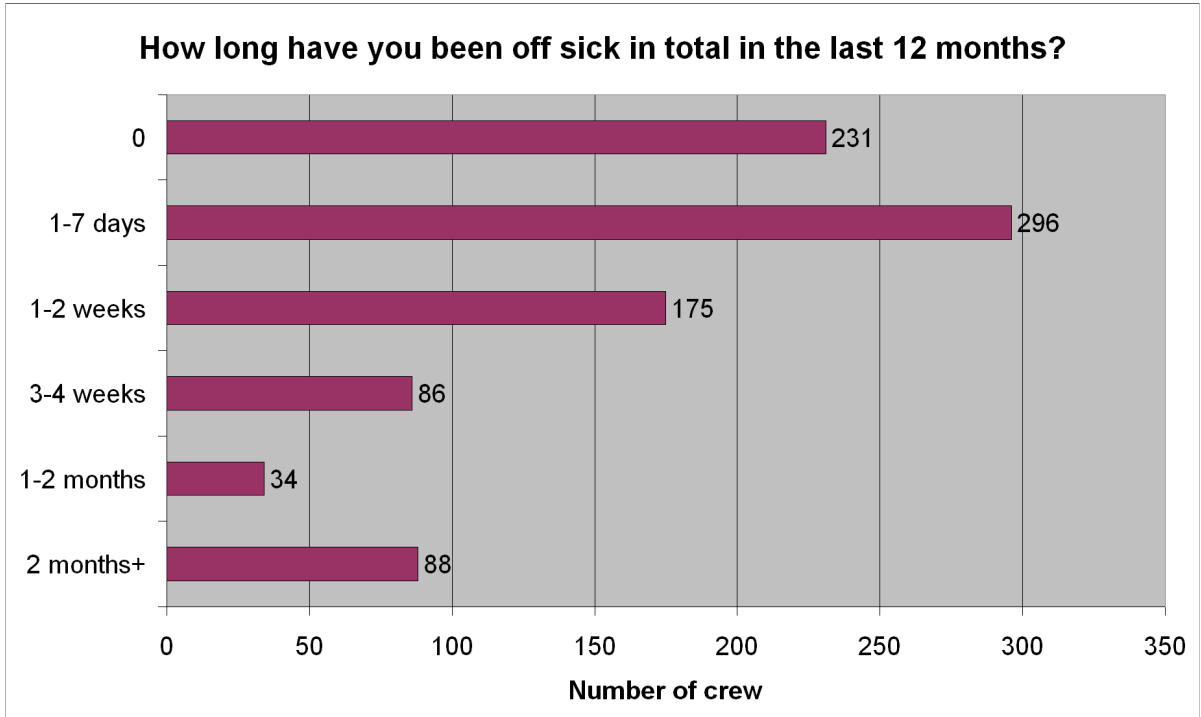
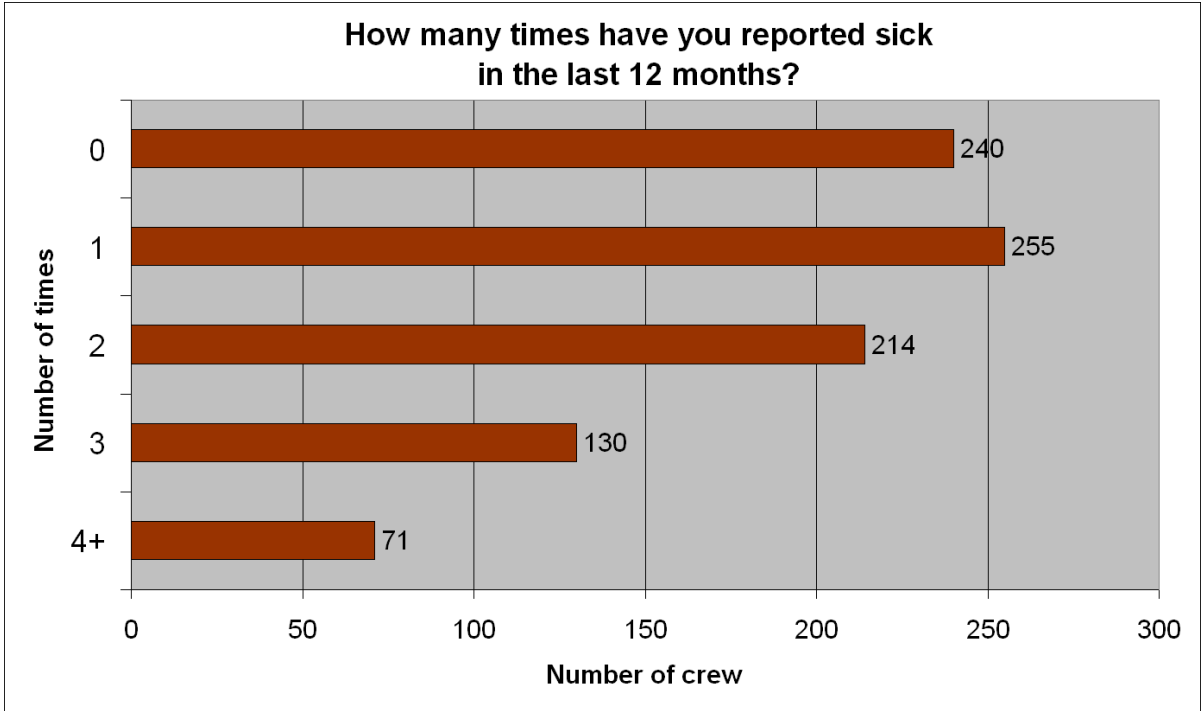
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Survey results



Have you been diagnosed with any of the following since you started flying?





What the crew told us

A selection of comments from the crew health surveys in their own words

Since I started flying I have never felt so unwell. My quality of life has changed beyond recognition. My personality was always joyful and positive – I am so negative now and cannot shake off an impending sense of doom. I have constant headaches and cannot stop crying.

I feel that my health is quickly deteriorating. I fly on prescribed antidepressants and have less stamina and more short spells of sickness than ever before.

I have been very, very ill 5 years+. I have been very shabbily treated by my manager. There have been days I couldn't have told you what my name was! I suffer THE most horrendous pain in my joints and muscles. BA are now trying to terminate my contract.

I've had blood tests showing high levels of petroleum related chemicals, nickel, cadmium and damage to enzymes and mitochondria, neurological tests showing some damage to nerve endings and damage consistent to exposure to toxins.

Flight Deck seem generally unwilling to report or investigate fumes. I suspect that Captains are being discouraged from using reporting procedure.

After working on the 777 prolonged leg aches of 2 days or more with severe headaches and nose bleeds usually 24 hours after flying.

Regular blood tests appeared to show that bloods were more abnormal after my working month and generally improved the month I wasn't working (part time).

I have had a few incidents whereby differing smells have been reported on several occasions. Fuel/oil most noticeably however one of the other smells that was particularly prevalent from time to time especially on older 747s was one of a burning electrical type.

4 years ago I became ill with a bad wheezy chest which I put down to maybe a flu virus. I had never had flu before and rarely catch a cold. This illness lasted from March until I ended up in hospital in July. Asthma was diagnosed. I firmly believe it was caused by flying as these symptoms still affect me sometimes when I am on an aircraft.

I find my concentration levels are much lower since I've been flying. Although my doctor has diagnosed me with asthma I do not take any medication.

Constant tiredness and lack of co-ordination. Unable to think clearly, cannot concentrate.

Have been trying to have a baby for over 2 years and have been told by fertility specialist that there is nothing wrong with me! I always have constant colds especially when I do several early shifts in a row, I'm instantly run down. Have never been so ill since starting this job! !

Started flying in 2006 with a charter airline. Experienced some numbness in toes after approx 6 months of flying on the A330. Feeling of numbness faded away during 6 months away from flying. I then moved to BA. About 6 months ago the numb feeling came back along with intermittent muscle pains, always in the 24 hours after a long haul flight. I was referred to a neurologist by my GP, who found no signs of any muscle condition.

Midwife said she could not believe how many problems I had for my age (26). It was quite unusual.

Twice within last 6 months I've operated back to base horizontally, having spent the previous 24 hours with nausea and vomiting. These incidents have not been officially reported. Both times I was operating on B777.

Am off sick at the moment with unexplained pains in my chest and back, pains in my arms, out of breath by just going up the stairs, am seeing a thyroid specialist as blood tests show high level of hypothyroidism.

I often feel vaguely unwell on the 777 – dizzy and prone to headaches. Can quite often detect very faint acrid smell in the air.

Since operating on B777 aircraft I have suffered increasing respiratory problems (shortness of breath on board) and nose bleeds.

Unable to physically get out of bed some days...severe pain in arms and legs..chronic chronic fatigue ...struggle some days to remember my name. Typically after working sectors I felt as if coming down with flu. Quite often remember smelling fumes in bunk areas on 747 during crew rest.

I go to work sick so that I won't get pulled up by my manager. I love my job to pieces but I have put my name down for part time as my body has changed so much since I started flying.

Diagnosed with Aerotoxic Syndrome. BA have denied any problems. Have noticed continued fuel smell on 767 on push back.

There is such a fear of reporting sick that many crew go in when they should not. I feel constantly tired, I also find that I often come down with sore throats and cold symptoms, particularly after being on the 777 aircraft. The crew often feel tired, dehydrated and sickly on this aircraft. I feel that it is amazing that airlines are prepared to use recycled and possibly toxic air in order to save money, rather than using fresh air in the cabin.

I have had the worst symptoms on Boeing 777 + 767. After about 10 minutes on board my nose and throat feel swollen and dry and I have severe dehydration. I no longer fly longhaul but while regularly on 777s I suffered terrible sleep disturbance, depression, mood swings, and a general feeling of being detached from life for about 1 year. I am also extremely worried about the numerous cases of cancer and infertility people suffer in this job and feel strongly that thorough research needs to take place.

I had toxic fumes on the Airbus 319 about 3 years ago, did not know what it was at the time till I saw a program on toxic fumes, had all the symptoms, sore eyes, nausea, hard to breathe, flight deck on oxygen feeling the same, company telling us if symptoms continue to go to hospital. Found out later that it was fumes from the oil filter (told by my manager.)

Despite being sick constantly with numerous complaints, because of the draconian sickness policy at british airways I am scared to call in sick and so go to work ill, so the body just seems to get worse and worse. Am in the process of having medical check ups to see whats wrong. The doctor is now sending for more liver and kidney tests.

Since flying on the 777 mostly feel short of breath, exhausted, aches in feet, legs and back, dry skin and nose bleeds, after flight constant sneezing. My lungs are still 100% toxic I cannot clear them. I have now been told my thyroid is failing.

Whilst flying on 777 I find the majority of my symptoms appear. Constant running nose, headache, nose bleeds, joint pains especially in my knees and muscle weakness.

Been tested several times for chronic fatigue, headaches, thyroid disorder, sleep problems & just generally feeling unwell.

My red blood cells are described as 'ragged' and homocysteine levels go up when back flying.

Headache after EVERY 777 flight sometimes bad sinus pain and dehydration even though I drink lots of water during the flight.

Over the last 2 yrs I have had bouts of vertigo which have increased in length each time. The last attack lasted for 7 weeks. On some occasions this has led to sudden loss of vision and blurred vision. I am currently awaiting the results of an MRI scan on my brain.

Feeling of dizziness on the 777. Very forgetful and often have a "not quite there" feeling.

Been positioned home TWICE by global lifeline. Am a trainer too and concerned that my job is at risk if I draw attention to my situation.

Was involved in a fumes incident flying into xxx, have never received any blood results from the clinic. The aircraft was carrying sodium selenite in the hold, when hold was opened the loading team were overcome by fumes. We have received nothing from BA about the cargo or our blood results.

Currently undergoing blood tests for a number of things including fatigue, diarrhoea, cholesterol level & full blood count. Stool sample came back clear indicating no infection.

Serious back pain as a result of flying.

At present I am suffering from acute throbbing pains in various parts of my body (shins, hands, arms) I have not been to my GP as I don't think they would be able to explain what is causing it and I would feel like a hypochondriac.

I have administered oxygen to myself on landing as I felt so dizzy and out of breath I feared for myself, I also know that many of my colleagues are sneaking puffs of oxygen as they feel faint, out of breath and dizzy but have been sick so often they are afraid of reporting sick for duty due to airline supervisors pressure and threats and lack of sick pay.

Headache on or just after every sector on 777.

Recurrent sore throats, lasts for about 4 weeks at a time and frequent sinus infections.

Ever since I started flying I have noticed that I experience extreme fatigue after flying duties. I have also suffered ongoing sinus problems and an increase in contracting cold and flu viruses and I am convinced this is related to flying. Over the years I have noticed an impairment in simple mental processes such as memory, mental arithmetic and sometimes even finding the words to speak! Before flying I considered myself fairly intelligent and articulate and educated to degree level. I am sure that lack of oxygen/poor air quality/cosmic radiation/increased cabin pressure/ other factors has contributed to my decrease in mental and physical wellbeing and I really do hope further research and help for those affected will be conducted in this area.

I collapsed at work and was rushed to hospital after landing. I had been on the 777.

Have had more sinus ops than I can remember since I started flying. Nose always worse on 777 always bleeds when I blow it, all symptoms worse on 777, dryness, tiredness, dizziness etc.

777 particularly bad. Every single trip on this aircraft I have at least 1 nosebleed and my eyes are always bloodshot. This takes about 24 hours after operating to clear.

I just get on with it at work, I don't want anyone to notice how I really feel.

Over the years my memory has become worse in all areas. I find it difficult to concentrate, I suffer more frequently from dizziness and imbalance. I find it more difficult to find the right words more and more every day.

I have been suffering with many of these symptoms over the past 3 years especially. The company I work for are constantly telling me that I am the only one with a problem, but I know of others who are too afraid to speak out. Two flight crew have been incapacitated recently. My GP is worried for my health. I was made an example of last year as I kept reporting problems and submitted an Air Safety Report. This led to me being grounded for 6 months as a warning to the other crew to keep quiet! Also, the flight crew will not put anything to do with fumes in the tech log.

Have had 2 fume events so far within a year. Both on old Airbus A320 during engine start up. Previously on Concorde we thought the DAILY occurrence of noxious fumes on engine start up was usual.

Under specialist for very poor memory, hospital said there is very strong evidence of quite rapid memory loss/deterioration there is no underlying reason for it that they could find.

My skin condition which appeared 3 years ago out of the blue, has started coming back, which is strange as I have been off for 15 months on maternity leave, where skin problem seemed to have cleared, but since back at work 3 months ago seems to be returning. A type of eczema.

All my allergy and auto-immune tests have come back negative. My Consultant says he believes I am an "intrinsically healthy person" and all my health problems have been caused by "external factors." My GP believes all my health problems have been caused by flying and has written Aerotoxic Syndrome on my medical certificate. I have been on sick leave for over a year and BA has threatened to terminate my contract on 3 occasions. If I can't recover and go back to work I will lose my home and everything I have spent my life working for. I thought there were employment laws designed to protect workers from this sort of thing. Why isn't anyone helping us?

Never been so ill since started flying. Had operation to clear sinus. Diagnosed asthmatic. Blocked ears. Chest infection approx 5 times. Diagnosed to have allergies.(Been flying 2 years.)

I started to suffer constant headaches, whilst flying on shorthaul for just over a year. Most days we were, especially on early morning flights on 757, subjected to fumes in the cabin...a lot of it and when asked we were told, by the Flight Deck that it was normal due to start up of APU. My IBS/headaches, along with very weak legs, just got worse. A few years later I suffered a brain haemorrhage and I had to have 2 operations. Every day I still suffer from headaches and severe back/leg pain. I have now been given a walking stick, a blue badge and was awarded DLA due to my health and mobility problems. I used to be a fit, healthy and vibrant person, until I started my flying career, I feel like an old lady now ...and I'm not! (Aged 37) My flying career has left me partially disabled. I have nearly died from it.

Up until now I just presumed that the symptoms were just "part of flying" and the lifestyle. I am now going to see my GP after reading Toxic Free Airlines. (23 year old who has only been flying 2 years and has developed tremors.)

Constant tiredness and lack of co-ordination. Unable to think clearly, cannot concentrate. (35 year old In Charge Crew Member on longhaul aircraft.)

Am now considering leaving flying as I am so fed up of feeling tired and unwell.

Have had quite severe headaches over last 10 years when flying on 757,

Operating on the B777 I have lost balance and fallen over in the cabin despite the aircraft being straight and level. I nearly always suffer with minor nose bleeds when operating this aircraft type.

Was diagnosed as asthmatic last year after a bout of feeling ill, with a severe cough and chest infection which continued for months.

Heart palpitations after flights for last 15 years.

I have been diagnosed with depression since 2004 and take regular medication, I have headaches on a regular basis, nose bleeds when flying on boeing 777. I have had no feeling in the left of my hand and little finger for some years. I take sleeping tablets every night and go through phases of not being able to get out of bed. I have a fear of going out and although I do I prefer to stay indoors where I feel safe. Bouts of diarrhoea come and go. I become very anxious when alone in hotel rooms, I end up in floods of tears.

I do not feel that flying has had a negative impact on my health at all. (27 year old male who's been flying 6 years)

Even when feeling ill I have to go in or I fear they will 'manage' me out of my job.

Progressive idiopathic neuropathy in feet started about 10 years ago and now beginning in hands.

No will to continue or take part in the flight, short term memory problems, word finding difficulties, a general slowing down of reactions and thinking times, a tingling in my finger tips. I also drove down the wrong side of the road twice, just after filling up with petrol and smelling the fumes. One day I breathed in a lot and suffered mentally for the short remainder of the flight. I then discovered through a colleague, exactly what organophosphate poisoning was. On reading up I found I had loads of the symptoms. I am still flying even though my company knows I am claiming to be poisoned by Ops. I ensure that whenever the aircraft smells, I use a combination of speedbrake and power that prevents idle power and so prevents the fumes entering. I am putting my, and my passengers health ahead of fuel economy. My health is permanently affected but I feel there is little I can do to prove it. (Captain)

Due to sickness policies introduced over the past two years, many crew now feel pressurized to fly when they are not 100% fit.

I sometimes feel I'm going mad and I fear if I suggest toxic air to my GP this might confirm that I am mad. I have refused anti-depressants prescribed by my GP, and symptoms have improved since being off work on unpaid leave.

I was diagnosed yesterday with severe hypertension. Treatment initiated immediately & off work now.

Since we started doing longhaul there have so many people with lung problems on our fleet!

Total number of fume events I was part of last year: 150! (26 year old cabin crew diagnosed with osteoarthritis)

I have been on toxic airplanes twice in last few months, first exposure was very ill and had severe memory loss and other neurological damage for 3 weeks. Second exposure happened two days ago. I got off the aircraft in question and refused to get back on, the aircraft has been grounded 2 times in the past 3 days and is now on its way to Nassau and not repaired!!!!

The constant fatigue and exhaustion I feel have greatly affected me over the last year to the extent I have no quality of life.

I have had colds every two months lasting an average about two weeks amounting to about 60 days off sick over the past 12 months.

Having been fit and healthy prior to flying, to suddenly be getting approx 3-4 recurrent bouts of flu and colds in the space of 4 months has been very frustrating and out of the norm for me.

I couldn't have radiotherapy or chemo for my cancer because it was a malignant melanoma. I had to have 2 operations to cut a big lump of my abdomen out and now have a nice big scar where my 6 pack should be. The Specialist said it was very rare to develop it so young, average age being 58....I'm 29.

My Dr has directly attributed my illness to exposures to fumes and toxic chemicals on the planes at work. I am about to lose my home to foreclosure and everything I have worked my entire life to obtain.