NEUROTOXIC NEWS
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A scandalous refusal

The government and industry refuse to participate in research on Aerotoxic Syndrome

It is outright ridiculous and irresponsible that both the government and the aviation industry continue to refuse to take responsibility for research into Aerotoxic Syndrome. The NeuroToxicity Research Foundation urgently wants to investigate the causes of this syndrome. But what happens? Silence. Evasive behavior. And not a single euro in funding to carry out international research.

Public health at risk, but no one cares

Aerotoxic Syndrome is not a conspiracy theory or panic-mongering. For decades, pilots, flight attendants, and passengers have reported severe neurological complaints that cannot be ignored—headaches, concentration problems, paralysis, chronic fatigue, and even permanent brain damage. The list of symptoms is alarmingly long.
Yet, the responsible authorities and companies refuse to finance independent research into these health risks or even take them seriously. And this despite the fact that they are responsible for the safety of their employees and customers!

Financial interests over human lifes

Why this stubborn refusal? The answer is as simple as it is shocking: money. Airlines and aircraft manufacturers fear massive lawsuits if it is conclusively proven that their aircraft pose a health risk. Governments, closely tied to the aviation industry, dare not overplay their hand and prefer to look the other way.

Time for action!

It is unacceptable that the NeuroToxicity Research Foundation has to beg for funding for research that is crucial for public health. Governments and companies have a moral duty to ensure transparency and safety. We must demand that these institutions take responsibility instead of burying their heads in the sand. This is not just about the health of pilots and cabin crew—it concerns everyone who ever sets foot on an airplane.

What we want

No more excuses. No more evasions. This research must happen, and it must happen now!
And because the government and industry refuse to help, we are asking for your donation. Every contribution, big or small, helps the NeuroToxicity Research Foundation financially support groundbreaking scientific research. Everyone can donate and thus contribute to the health of future generations. More information about the foundation and how to donate can be found at https://neurotoxicityresearch.org.

Neuro Toxicity Research Foundation

Stewardess Judith (46)

"I Literally Felt the Strength Drain from My Body"

For 25 years, Judith worked as a flight attendant for one of the major airlines. Nothing ever seemed wrong—until last summer, during a flight from New Delhi, she suddenly suffered severe health issues. A combination of exhaustion and a strong kerosene odor caused her to lose consciousness for nearly 45 minutes.

The nightmare begins

By now, more than six months have passed, and Judith finally feels better. She sleeps well again and is slowly rebuilding her life. However, she has taken a different job—flying is no longer an option for her.

This nightmare began in the summer of 2023. Judith was on a routine flight to New Delhi. "A normal flight, nothing special." Once she arrived, she took a walk around the city and bought some food at a small supermarket. That evening, before going to work the next day, she relaxed in her hotel room, watching TV and chatting with her boyfriend via text. "I felt happy and good that day. Yes, I was tired, but that was nothing unusual. You deal with jet lag, and I hadn't been sleeping well for weeks. I'm a single mother, and my son had been struggling with bedwetting for a long time. The sleepless nights were tough."

Traffic jam on the runway

For the return night flight to Amsterdam, a Boeing 777 was ready. "It's a tough flight. You're already tired, and then you have to work through the night." After taxiing to the runway, the aircraft got stuck in a queue of planes. "We were told we were tenth in line. It wasn't unusual for us to have to wait for takeoff."

While waiting, a strong kerosene odor filled the aircraft. "The fumes from the planes ahead of us blew straight into our cabin. It had never been this bad before," Judith recalls. "Multiple people noticed it—passengers were getting headaches and sore throats. I felt increasingly nauseous. The senior purser called from the other side of the aircraft to check how my colleague and I were doing in business class. I told her I wasn't feeling well but hoped we would take off soon. At that point, there was nothing we could do. We were strapped into our seats for takeoff. It felt like a hand was squeezing my throat. All I wanted was to lie down—I felt that awful. I felt the strength drain from my body."

45 minutes unconscious

As soon as the aircraft took off, Judith lost consciousness. "I literally felt myself slipping away." She was unconscious for 45 minutes. "Luckily, there were doctors on board who were immediately alerted. They checked my vitals and gave me extra fluids. My vital signs were okay, but they were concerned because I didn't wake up quickly. Usually, when someone faints, they come to within a few minutes."

Judith spent the rest of the flight resting in the pilots' crew rest area, monitored by her colleagues. Upon arrival at Schiphol, she was taken off the plane in a wheelchair and examined by the airport's medical team.

Fear of flying

In the weeks following the incident, Judith felt like she was living in a fog. "I did my daily tasks and took care of my kids, but I wanted nothing else. My boyfriend later told me it was like I wasn't really present."

In August, she had planned a vacation with her children and a friend. "We had to fly. At just the thought of it, I started crying. But the trip was booked and paid for, and the kids were excited—so we went. We had a great time, but I've never been so happy to be home again."

In September, Judith knew for sure: she never wanted to fly again. Still, in December, she took one more flight, this time with her boyfriend to Spain. Again, they had to wait behind several aircraft at Schiphol. "I smelled the kerosene again and felt exactly like I did in New Delhi. Fortunately, the wait was shorter this time, and the feeling passed after takeoff."

Neurological examination needed

Judith is now seeking answers—was this a physical issue, or was it psychological? She has been referred to a neurologist at AMC, but it's uncertain whether her airline will cover the costs.

An unhealthy job

Whether her symptoms are due to the much-discussed Aerotoxic Syndrome, caused by toxic fumes from aircraft engine oil entering the cabin, she isn't sure. "My boyfriend researched it. I don't know if that's what it is. I don't have all the symptoms, and I never had issues before. But I do know that flying is not healthy. That's why I made my decision: never again."

Fume event?

Don't be ridiculous: you're just burnt out

You wouldn't believe how much airline staff is sent home this way. Overstimulated, chronically fatigued, debilitating headaches... These are just a few of the symptoms this group experiences.

Remarkably, these complaints often arise after an intensive period of numerous short European flights, after a clear fume event, or following a situation where the plane has been stuck on the runway for half an hour – behind ten other planes emitting their kerosene fumes.

But that can't possibly be the cause, according to the company doctor.

Have you experienced this? Or do you know someone who has been brushed aside like this? We'd love to hear from you. Anonymously, of course, because we know how sensitive this information is.

Make sure to follow us on LinkedIn for more insights and information.

Photo: istock/Leonid Andronov
Judith is a pseudonym. Her real name is known to the editorial team.

Toxic Substances Are All Around Us

Aerotoxic Syndrome is caused by prolonged exposure to toxic substances in the air inside aircraft. However, what many people don't realize is that the same harmful chemicals, such as organophosphates, are also present in our daily lives. From pesticides on our food to chemicals used at airports and in aircraft, the impact on our health is more significant than we often think.

What happens in airplanes?

In aircraft, organophosphates appear in several ways. They are found in hydraulic oils used for aircraft maintenance. Cleaning chemicals, often used without proper ventilation, leave toxic fumes lingering in the cabin. Even the food service trollies contain organophosphates—these are cleaned with high-pressure sprays, but residues remain.

The issue worsens in winter: de-icing chemicals, used to remove ice from aircraft wings, contain organophosphates. These substances accumulate around the engines, and since cabin air is often drawn directly from the engines, passengers and crew unknowingly inhale these toxic fumes, even with the slightest leakage.

The danger of pesticides in daily life

Organophosphates aren't just found in airplanes; they are widely used in agriculture as pesticides to combat weeds and insects. These chemicals can spread through the air, water, and soil, putting people living or working near agricultural areas at greater risk of direct exposure through inhalation or skin contact.

Even if you don't live near farmland, pesticides still find their way into your body. Fruits and vegetables treated with pesticides can introduce these harmful chemicals into your system. Some produce—such as berries, citrus fruits, and grapes—are heavily sprayed. While our bodies can break down some toxins, prolonged exposure can lead to health problems, including respiratory issues, skin irritations, and even neurological disorders like Alzheimer's.

What Can You Do?

Awareness is the first step. If you fly frequently, try to minimize exposure to toxic substances by choosing airlines that use cleaner technologies or opting for shorter flights when possible.

At home, you can reduce pesticide exposure by:
Washing fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
Buying organic products when possible.
Keeping your living space clean and well-ventilated.
These small changes can help lower your risk of exposure to harmful chemicals.