

## Helicopter Companions

Pilots will tell you that some of the best times they had flying included a friend or family member who was not a pilot. Whether going somewhere special, or for a hundred-dollar hamburger, the expression on their faces during the first takeoff is priceless.

Every pilot knows that the first step to a safe flight is a thorough preflight. This includes consideration for some challenges when flying with others who are not pilots. That is especially true in helicopters.

As the pilot, you may want to explain some of the basic operating differences between an airplane and a helicopter. These could include how the helicopter main and tail rotor systems work versus the airplane propeller, the difference between how airplanes

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and helicopters take off and land, or why helicopter pilots fly from the right seat while airplane pilots fly from the left. You may want to walk passengers through your preflight inspection and answer questions they may have. This practice will boost their confidence in you as a knowledgeable and safe pilot.

Most small helicopters allow for the pilot to remove the passenger side collective, cyclic, and anti-torque pedals. If your flight doesn't involve flight instruction, you may want to consider removing those controls. Just be sure to review the rotorcraft flight manual to determine if this function requires a mechanic. If there are no restrictions, but you've never done this before, have a flight instructor or mechanic familiar with your helicopter walk you through the process.

If you choose not to remove the passenger side flight controls, brief your passenger on the importance of not grabbing or bumping the flight controls during flight. A good method I've found is to have passengers keep their feet flat on the floor away from the anti-torque pedals, and to keep their hands in their laps if they're not taking pictures or holding on to something.

It's important to secure all loose items. If an item can fly out, fall, roll under your feet, or get stuck somewhere out of reach, secure it in a cockpit or baggage compartment. If your passenger has a camera, make sure they secure the camera's strap around their wrist or neck to prevent it from falling, and brief them to keep it away from the pilot's collective flight control.

After you've conducted the required passenger briefing on the use of safety belts, you may want to share a few more safety items. Pilot and passenger conversations are encouraged. However, brief your passengers that you may have to stop a conversation abruptly in order to communicate with ATC, other aircraft, or to maintain a sterile cockpit during critical phases of the flight such as takeoff, landing, or hovering. Agree on a short phrase or a hand gesture as a signal that you need to stop the conversation.

Another very important briefing item for helicopter safety is instructing the passenger on how to exit while the rotor blades are still turning. The best way to avoid accidental contact with moving rotor blades, especially the tail rotor, is for everyone to remain inside the helicopter until the rotor blades come to a complete stop. However, if your passengers need to exit the helicopter before the rotor blades have stopped turning, direct them to walk perpendicular from the helicopter's longitudinal axis, and stay low until well clear of the rotor blades. Never walk towards the rear of the helicopter.

Take some time to develop your own passenger briefing card and include these points to standardize your passenger briefings.

Fly smart, fly safe.

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