

Driving when you are taking medications.

For most people, driving represents freedom, control and independence. Driving enables most people to get to the places they want or need to go. For many people, driving is important economically – some drive as part of their job or to get to and from work.

Driving is a complex skill. Our ability to drive safely can be affected by changes in our physical, emotional and mental condition. The goal of this brochure is to help you and your health care professional talk about how your medications may affect your ability to drive safely.

How can medications affect my driving?

People take medications for a variety of reasons. Those can include:

- ◆ allergies
- ◆ anxiety
- ◆ cold
- ◆ depression
- ◆ diabetes
- ◆ heart and cholesterol conditions
- ◆ high blood pressure
- ◆ muscle spasms
- ◆ pain
- ◆ Parkinson's disease
- ◆ schizophrenia

Medicines include medications that your doctor prescribes and over-the-counter medications that you buy without a doctor's prescription. Many individuals also take herbal supplements. Some of these medications and supplements may cause a variety of reactions that may make it more difficult for you to drive a car safely. These reactions may include:

- ◆ sleepiness
- ◆ blurred vision
- ◆ dizziness
- ◆ slowed movement
- ◆ fainting
- ◆ inability to focus or pay attention
- ◆ nausea

Often people take more than one medication at a time. The combination of different medications can cause problems for some people. This is especially true for older adults because they take more medications than any other age group. Due to changes in the body as people age, older adults are more prone to medication related problems. The more medications you take, the greater your risk that your medicines will affect your ability to drive safely. To help avoid problems, it is important that at least once a year you talk to your doctor or pharmacist about all the medications – both prescription and over-the-counter – you are taking. Also let your professional know what herbal supplements, if any, you are taking. Do this even if your medications and supplements are not currently causing you a problem.

Can I still drive safely if I am taking medications?

Yes, most people can drive safely if they are taking medications. It depends on the effect those medications – both prescription and over-the-counter – have on your driving. In some cases you may not be aware of the effects. But, in many instances, your doctor can help to minimize the negative impact of your medications on your driving in several ways. Your doctor may be able to:

- ◆ Adjust the dose;
- ◆ Adjust the timing of doses or when you take the medication;
- ◆ Add an exercise or nutrition program to lessen the need for medication; and
- ◆ Change medication to one that causes less drowsiness.

What can I do if I am taking medications?

Talk to your doctor honestly.

When your doctor prescribes a medicine for you, ask about side effects. How should you expect the medicine to affect your ability to drive? Remind your doctor of other medications – both prescription and over-the-counter – and herbal supplements you are taking, especially if you see more than one doctor. Talking honestly with your doctor also means telling the doctor if you are not taking all or any of the prescribed medication. Do not stop taking your medication unless your doctor tells you to.

Ask your doctor if you should drive — especially when you first take a medication.

Taking a new medication can cause you to react in a number of ways. It is recommended that you do not drive when you first start taking a new medication until you know how that drug affects you. You also need to be aware that some over-the-counter medicines and herbal supplements can make it difficult for you to drive safely.

Talk to your pharmacist.

Get to know your pharmacist. Ask the pharmacist to go over your medications with you and to remind you of effects they may have on your ability to drive safely. Be sure to request printed information about the side effects of any new medication. Remind your pharmacist of other medicines and herbal supplements you are taking. Pharmacists are available to answer questions wherever you get your medications. Many people buy medicines by mail. Mail-order pharmacies have a toll-free number you can call and a pharmacist available to answer your questions about medications.

Monitor yourself.

Learn to know how your body reacts to the medications and supplements. Keep track of how you feel after you take the medication. For example, do you feel sleepy? Is your vision blurry? Do you feel weak and slow? When do these things happen?

Let your doctor and pharmacist know what is happening.

No matter what your reaction is to taking a medicine – good or bad – tell your doctor and pharmacist. Both prescription and over-the-counter medications are powerful—that’s why they work. Each person is unique. Two people may respond differently to the same medicine. If you are experiencing side effects, the doctor needs to know that in order to adjust your medication. Your doctor can help you find medications that work best for you.


What if I have to cut back or give up driving?

You can keep your independence even if you have to cut back or give up on your driving due to your need to take medications. It may take planning ahead on your part, but it will get you to the places you want to go and the people you want to see. Consider:

- ◆ rides with family and friends;
- ◆ taxi cabs;
- ◆ shuttle buses or vans;
- ◆ public buses, trains and subways; and
- ◆ walking.

Also, senior centers and religious and other local service groups often offer transportation services for older adults in the community.

Who can I call for help with transportation?

 Call the ElderCare Locator at **1-800-677-1116** and ask for the phone number of your local Office on Aging, or go to their website at www.eldercare.gov.


Contact your regional transit authority to find out which bus or train to take.

 Call Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation) at **1-800-659-6428** or go to their website at www.easterseals.com/transportation.

Where do I find out more about medications?

Your first step is to talk with your health care professional. You also can contact the:

- ◆ American Pharmacists Association
www.pharmacyandyou.org
- ◆ National Association of Chain Drug Stores
www.nacds.org

 You also can get a copy of the “Age Page On Older Drivers” from the National Institute on Aging by calling **1-800-222-2225**, or by going to their website at www.niapublications.org/engagepages/drivers.asp

Wear your safety belt

Always wear your safety belt when you are driving or riding in a car. Make sure that every person who is riding with you also is buckled up. Wear your safety belt even if your car has air bags.

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