



# TREDS

## MEDICATIONS AND DRIVING: A GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS



### DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS (DUID)

Many substances, including prescription and over-the-counter drugs, recreationally-used marijuana and other drugs, as well as alcohol, have the potential to interfere with the ability to drive safely. This risk increases with the number of medications consumed. A study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that over 90 percent of older drivers take prescription medications, and over two-thirds of those take multiple medications.<sup>1</sup> Research tells us:

- Among drivers tested in fatal vehicle crashes, drivers that test positive for drugs of potential abuse (e.g. cannabis, opioids, and benzodiazepines) now surpass those that test positive for alcohol.<sup>2</sup>
- 64 percent of drivers over the age of 50 responsible for a motor vehicle crash had received a prescription for a potentially driver-impairing medication within the past 60 days.<sup>3</sup>
- Of older road users taking one or more medications, only 28 percent reported an awareness of the potential impact those medications might have on driving performance.<sup>4</sup>
- Only 18 percent of older road users reported receiving a warning from a healthcare professional about medications that may impact driving.<sup>4</sup>



### HOW MEDICATIONS CAN AFFECT DRIVING

- Similar to alcohol and cannabis, prescription medications can impair the performance of drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists.<sup>2</sup>
- The effects of prescription drugs on driving ability are influenced by dose and variation within and between drug classes. Polypharmacy and drug interactions further influence impairment.

- Mixing prescription drugs with cannabis and alcohol potentiates impairment.
- Herbal and dietary supplements can interact with prescription medications and potentiate side effects.<sup>5</sup>
- Reactions to medication that affect driving safety<sup>6</sup> include:
  - › Blurred vision
  - › Confusion and inability to focus
  - › Dizziness
  - › Drowsiness
  - › Hypotension and syncope
  - › Shakiness and slowed movement
- The prescription medications most often associated with older road user crashes are **benzodiazepines**, **tricyclic antidepressants**, and **opioid analgesics**. Other offending categories of medication<sup>3,7,8</sup> include:
  - › Anti-emetics
  - › Antihistamines
  - › Sedatives
  - › Over-the-counter medications
- To learn more about the most and least offending medications on driving ability, the TREDS pocket guide on Medications and Driving can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/medications-and-driving>



### DUID AND THE LAW

- DUID is illegal in every state.<sup>9</sup>
- Proof of drug impairment is done through roadside testing, and analysis of blood, urine, or saliva.<sup>9</sup>
- A valid prescription cannot be used as a positive defense for a DUID charge.<sup>10</sup>
- The cost of a DUID offense is estimated at more than \$15,000, including fines, legal fees, insurance increases, costs of alternate transportation, lost wages, and other consequences of having a criminal record.<sup>10</sup>



## SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS

- Practice the “brown bag review.” Have patients bring all prescriptions and OTC medications to their medical and pharmacy visits regularly to review for drug interaction and to eliminate unnecessary medications.<sup>11</sup>
- When starting patients on a new medication, use the lowest effective dose and choose the least impairing drug in that class.<sup>6</sup>
- Encourage patients to report side effects from medications.<sup>6</sup>
- Counsel patients on the potential effects of impairing medications on driving ability. Advise use of alternative transportation if medications can impair driving, especially when first prescribed.<sup>6</sup>
- Caution patients about the potential consequences of consuming alcohol or cannabis when using prescription medication.
- Incorporate the topic of medications and driving into the general screening process.



## RESOURCES

- <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drug-impaired-driving> - Provides an overview of the issue of drug impaired driving and current legislative movements to the issue.
- <http://www.roadwiserx.com/> - Allows patients to enter all of their medications to learn about potential drug interactions and each medication’s effect on driving ability.
- [www.fda.gov/cder](http://www.fda.gov/cder) - Provides access to all known information regarding FDA approved medications, including proper drug use, safety, and storage.
- <https://medlineplus.gov/druginformation.html> - Offers a database of prescription medications, OTC medications, herbs, and supplements and their respective side effects, dosage, and drug interactions.
- <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm107894.htm> - Lists medications that require caution with driving and suggests transportation alternatives.

## REFERENCES

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## TRAINING, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION FOR DRIVING SAFETY

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