



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.¹ 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.²
- 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.³
- 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.⁴
- Only 18 percent of older road users reported receiving a warning from a healthcare professional about medications that may impact driving.⁴



HOW MEDICATIONS CAN AFFECT DRIVING

- Similar to alcohol and cannabis, prescription medications can impair the performance of drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists.²
- 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.⁵
- Reactions to medication that affect driving safety⁶ 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^{3,7,8} 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: treds.ucsd.edu/_files/Medications-by-Class-and-Driving-Risk.pdf



DUID AND THE LAW

- DUID is illegal in every state.⁹
- Proof of drug impairment is done through roadside testing, and analysis of blood, urine, or saliva.⁹
- A valid prescription cannot be used as a positive defense for a DUID charge.¹⁰
- 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.¹⁰



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.¹¹
- When starting patients on a new medication, use the lowest effective dose and choose the least impairing drug in that class.¹¹
- Encourage patients to report side effects from medications.⁶
- 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.⁶
- 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

- nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drug-impaired-driving - Provides an overview of the issue of drug impaired driving and current legislative movements to the issue.
- drugs.com/drug-interaction.html - Allows patients to enter all of their medications to learn about potential drug interactions and each medication’s effect on driving ability.
- fda.gov/cder - Provides access to all known information regarding FDA approved medications, including proper drug use, safety, and storage.
- medlineplus.gov/druginformation.html - Offers a database of prescription medications, OTC medications, herbs, and supplements and their respective side effects, dosage, and drug interactions.
- aarp.org/health/drugs-supplements/medicines-that-impair-driving/ - Describes certain medications with side effects that can make it unsafe to drive.

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