

DON'T MOTOR ON MEDS

IT'S ILLEGAL!



FACT: Taking Medication Can Seriously
Affect Your Driving Abilities



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Are you a driver



Whether you are taking medicines prescribed by your doctor or using a remedy bought over the counter at a pharmacy, you should check to make sure that they will not affect your ability to drive.

Here are some questions often asked by drivers on this subject:

Is it true that medication can affect my driving ability?

Most definitely yes. Research shows that even everyday medical remedies can cause drowsiness, affect your concentration, increase your reaction times and impair your overall driving ability.

Will I be breaking the law if I drive whilst under the influence of medication?

Driving under the influence of drugs (even those prescribed by a doctor) is a serious criminal offence. The Road Traffic Act 1988 says, 'You must not drive under the influence of drugs or medicine'.

Surely this would only be treated as a minor offence?

No, not at all. In most circumstances this offence would be considered in the same way as a drink driving conviction, and carry similar penalties.

Would it be ok to drive if I only take medication prescribed by my doctor?

Not necessarily. Many drugs, including those issued by GPs can have an adverse effect on your ability to drive safely.

What about medication that I purchase 'over the counter' at a chemist. Will I be ok to drive while taking these?

Again, not necessarily. Cough remedies, cold and flu treatments, pain killers, antihistamines, even some eye drops can affect your central nervous system in a way which will make you feel drowsy and less able to concentrate on the driving task.

How can I find out if my medicine is safe to use with regards to driving?

All medicines that may cause drowsiness or that may adversely affect your driving will carry a warning. However sometimes this warning is difficult to find. Before taking any medication it is vital to check with your doctor or your pharmacist that you are safe to continue driving. It is your legal duty to do this and it would not be a defence to later claim that as your doctor issued the medicine you thought it would be ok to drive. Often there are alternative medicines that offer the same level of treatment but do not impair driving. Again check that your medicine is the most suitable for you.

taking medicine?

Is it true that mixing one small alcoholic drink with some medication can dramatically reduce my driving ability?

Yes very much so. It can be extremely dangerous to mix alcohol and drugs before driving. Even if the alcohol level is way below the 'drink drive' limit the combination could lead to serious impairment and your licence could be at risk.

If I only take medication during the evening or night, will it be ok to drive the next morning?

Not necessarily. Some medications take several hours to disappear from your body so you could still be suffering their impairing effects the morning after taking them. You should check this with your doctor or pharmacist. If after taking medicine you feel drowsy, confused, light headed, or otherwise impaired do not drive until you have sought professional help.

I have been prescribed more than one item of medication for my condition and none of the items carry a driving warning, will I be safe to drive?

Possibly not. Although each drug taken alone may have no effect on your driving, when taken together the effects can be unpredictable. You should check that the combination of two or more drugs would not affect your ability to drive. The same applies when taking more than one 'over the counter' remedy. Your doctor or pharmacist will help you.

I will soon be completing a course of medication which has prevented me from driving. Will I be able to resume driving immediately after finishing the last dose?

Not necessarily. For example if the medication has helped you to sleep it could be that after the course has been completed your sleep patterns may be disturbed causing you to be fatigued. Again seek professional guidance before resuming driving.

I am confused by the warnings given on medication. Some say 'may be affected' others say 'must not drive' and some warnings are difficult to find. Would it not be better to have a clearer warning system?

The short answer is 'yes'. However, agreement on a revised system is yet to be approved. The only current safe option if you are in any doubt about your prescription is to seek professional advice.

ITV's This Morning's resident health expert Dr Chris Steele MBE said:

"In some circumstances driving while impaired by medication can be as dangerous as 'drink driving'. I strongly support the advice given in this leaflet that drivers taking medicine should always check with their doctor or pharmacist before they drive."

Dr Chris Steele MBE is a practicing GP and has appeared on ITV's This Morning since the programme began in 1988. He is also a regular contributor to Woman magazine. He has his own website www.thefamilygp.com offering a wealth of information on family health issues.



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