

# Medicines and driving

Some medicines can affect the ability to drive, cycle or use machinery. You need to be alert and able to respond quickly to changes in your environment when doing these tasks. Different people are affected by medicines in different ways and not everyone is affected to the same extent. You may not notice the effect of a medicine until it is too late. When starting a new medicine, always ask your pharmacist if it is safe to drive, cycle or use machinery and what warning signs to look for. If it is not safe, **DO NOT DRIVE OR OPERATE DANGEROUS MACHINERY.**

## Reactions to medicines

Medicines sometimes cause side effects and can reduce mental or physical abilities. For example, some medicines can cause:

- Drowsiness or tiredness
- Dizziness, light-headedness or faintness
- Confusion or poor concentration
- Shakiness, unsteadiness or anxiety
- Mood changes (e.g., feelings of anger)
- Nausea, vomiting
- Problems with eyesight or hearing
- Slow reaction times.

These effects can make it unsafe to drive, cycle or use machinery.



## Risks

If you drive when your driving skills are affected by medicines, you may cause an accident. You risk killing or injuring yourself or other people, damaging property, losing your licence and losing your insurance cover.

The effect of a medicine on your driving may be greater:

- If you also drink alcohol
- If you take two (or more) medicines that have similar effects on your driving
- When you start using a new medicine
- When the dose of your medicine is changed
- If you take more than the prescribed dose of your medicine
- As you get older
- If you are tired.

## Medicines

Both prescription and non-prescription medicines can affect driving skills. Medicines that can affect your ability to drive, cycle or use machinery include those used to treat:

- Sleeping problems
- Epilepsy (convulsions)
- Heart conditions
- High blood pressure
- Fluid retention
- Inflammation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Heartburn, indigestion
- Nervous system diseases
- Some infections
- Anxiety ('nerves')
- Mental illness (e.g., depression, schizophrenia)
- Pain (including period pain)

- Headaches and Migraine
- Travel sickness
- Coughs and colds
- Allergies (e.g., hay fever)
- Stomach and duodenal ulcers
- Eye conditions
- Diabetes
- Drug addiction and withdrawal (e.g., methadone dosing)

## Self care

- If you do experience unwanted effects from your medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist if there is an alternative. For example, some antihistamines for hay fever are less likely to make you drowsy than others.
- Ask your pharmacist for a list of all your medicines and for information about their side effects.
- Use public transport, take a taxi or ask a friend to drive if you are taking medicines that could affect your driving.
- Do not drive if you have missed a dose of your prescribed medicine, and your health condition can make driving dangerous (e.g., epilepsy).
- Manage medical conditions by taking medicines correctly – ask your pharmacist for help.
- If you are taking medicine, ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice before drinking alcohol.
- Do not drive when you are tired, particularly on longer trips.

- Do not use another person's medicine – it could have a different effect on you, possibly affecting your driving.

## Alcohol

Even a small amount of alcohol, especially if combined with some medicines, can affect your driving skills.

Think of yourself and others – do not drive if you have been drinking alcohol.

## Illegal drugs

Most illegal drugs will affect your alertness or reaction times. Do not drive if you have used these substances.

## Important

- If your medicine affects your driving, stop driving, not your medicine, and talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
- Ask your pharmacist or doctor if the medicine you are taking (prescription or non-prescription) may affect your driving. Some medicines may affect your driving only until your body gets used to them. Other medicines may affect your driving all the time you are taking them.
- Read all the labels on all medicines you take. Check with your pharmacist when your medicines have the following labels:

This medicine may cause drowsiness and may increase the effects of alcohol.  
If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

**OR**

This medicine may affect mental alertness and/or coordination.  
If affected, do not drive a motor vehicle or operate machinery.

**OR**

This preparation is to aid sleep.  
Drowsiness may continue the following day.  
If affected, do not drive or operate machinery. Avoid alcohol.

## For more information

### **A doctor**

Listed under medical practitioners in the yellow pages or the phone book.

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://www.nps.org.au)

### **The Poisons Information Centre**

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.  
Ask a pharmacist for advice when  
choosing a medicine.***

## Related fact cards

» *Alcohol*

» *Wise Use of Medicines  
(website only – ask your  
pharmacist)*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: