

Best Practice Guide

Wellbeing



Take Care Of Yourself

The importance of a healthy lifestyle should never be underestimated particularly by drivers.

Driver wellbeing relates to any lifestyle factor that can affect safety on the road, including diet, exercise, sleep, drugs & alcohol, health and relaxation. An unhealthy lifestyle can lead to mistakes on the road, which can lead to crashes and injuries.

There are many relatively simple steps that you can take in your personal life to help keep you as safe as possible on the road.

Sleep Well

The amount of sleep each person needs varies. Most adults need between seven and eight hours each night although some need more and some need less. You should be able to tell whether you are getting the right amount of sleep by how you feel during the day. If you feel drowsy you probably haven't had enough sleep.

You Are What You Eat

You may not associate your diet with your safety on the road but what you eat can affect your energy levels and affect your concentration while driving. Eating carbohydrate rich foods such as bread and pasta can make you feel sleepy while sugary foods can lead to bursts and dips in energy levels.

A healthy diet should include:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Plenty of water as a lack of fluids can cause you to feel fatigued due to dehydration.
- Bread, cereals and potatoes.
- Smaller amounts of milk and dairy foods (low fat where possible).
- Smaller amounts of meat, fish, beans and nuts (low fat where possible).
- Tiny amounts of fatty and sugary foods.

Get Physical

Everyone should have at least 30 minutes of moderate physical exercise each day. Exercise can help you to sleep better, give you more energy and help to reduce levels of stress. Exercising doesn't have to be tough.

It could include:

- A gentle stroll.
- A kick-around with a ball.
- Swimming.
- Tennis or squash.
- Taking your dog for a walk.

Reduce Stress

There are many causes of stress, including pressure at work, exposure to extreme noise at work, relationship problems, bereavement, moving house, a new baby or financial issues.

Stress can have a negative effect on driver safety and if left to get out of control it can result in the following behaviour:

- Tailgating.
- Flashing lights or blowing horns at other road users.
- Speeding.
- Aggressive gestures.
- Deliberately obstructing other vehicles.
- Verbal and physical abuse.

If you think that you could be suffering from stress, it is time to assess your lifestyle and look at ways of reducing your stress levels before you become a danger on the road.

Read The Labels

Over-the-counter medicines such as antihistamines and cold and flu remedies can have quite serious side-effects which can make driving dangerous.

These might include:

- Poor concentration.
- Poor co-ordination.
- Altered reaction times.
- Blurred vision.
- Fatigue / drowsiness.
- Nausea.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Panic attacks.
- Over-confidence.

Always check with the person dispensing the medicines whether it is safe to drive.

Check Your Eyes

As a minimum, all drivers should have their eyesight tested at least once every two years. In addition to this, you must get your sight checked if you notice that it has deteriorated, as eyesight can deteriorate quickly, especially if you are an older driver.

If you do wear glasses or contact lenses make sure you always keep a spare pair in your vehicle, just in case you ever misplace your usual pair and need to drive.

Don't Soldier On

Common health conditions can affect your ability to drive. This may include colds, flu, migraine, hay fever, stomach upsets, sinus problems, anything that can take your mind off the road or affect your ability to concentrate. If you are feeling under the weather the safest option is to take a few days off and give yourself enough time to recover before attempting to drive.

Wise Up On Drugs And Alcohol

Driving while impaired through any substance is incredibly dangerous. Illegal drugs and alcohol can have many side effects and can affect a driver's behaviour and body in many ways.

These can include:

- Slower reaction times.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Fatigue.
- Erratic behaviour.
- Over-confidence.
- Distorted perception of hazards.
- Blurred vision.
- Dizziness.

The effects of illegal drugs can last for hours or even days. So even if you take drugs on a Friday night you may still be impaired on Monday. Similarly, alcohol takes time to leave the body and if you have several drinks during an evening there is a good chance you will still be impaired the next morning.

Warning

Research carried out at the King's College, London, showed that immediately after smoking a cigarette, people felt significantly more tense, furious and impatient than non-smokers and also experienced dizziness.

Additionally, the physical action of removing the hand from the wheel to smoke is a distraction and increases crash risk, so if you are a smoker you should refrain from smoking while driving.

Water should be drunk regularly to keep you hydrated.

Exercise is essential for a healthy lifestyle.

Listen to your body - if you are not well it is safest to avoid driving.

Look for signs of stress.

Beware of side effects when taking medication.

Eat a balanced diet.

Impairment through drugs and alcohol can last for days.

Never forget the importance of enough sleep.

Get your eyes tested regularly.