

Prevent Becoming a Victim of a Drunk Driver

It has only been within the past 20 years that people have begun to recognize the dangers associated with drunk driving. Through a concerted effort involving many concerned groups, including educators, media, legislators, law enforcement, and community organizations, there has been a decline in the numbers of people killed or injured due to drunk driving. It is also important to recognize and address the similar dangers that can occur with drugged driving. Remember - **every single injury and death caused by drunk or drugged driving is totally preventable.**

The principal concern regarding drugged driving is that driving under the influence of any drug (including alcohol) that acts on the brain impairs your motor skills, reaction time, and judgment. Drugged driving is a public health concern because it puts not only the driver at risk, but passengers and others who share the road.

In this article you will learn what makes drugged driving so dangerous, the effects of different types of drugs, what you can do to prevent becoming a victim and what you can do to avoid being the one driving under the influence.



Why is Drugged Driving Hazardous?

Drugs and alcohol act on your brain and can alter perception, cognition, attention, balance, coordination, and other faculties required for safe driving. The effects of specific drugs of abuse differ depending on their mechanisms of action, the amount consumed, the history of the user, and other factors.

For example, evidence from both real and simulated driving studies indicates that marijuana can negatively impact a driver's attentiveness, perception of time and speed, and the ability to draw on information obtained through past experiences. Research also shows that impairment increases significantly when marijuana use is combined with alcohol. In addition, many medications (e.g., drugs for anxiety or pain) act on systems in the brain that could impair driving ability. In fact, many prescription drugs come with warnings against the operation of machinery - including vehicles - for a specified period of time after use. When prescription drugs are taken without medical supervision (i.e., when abused), impaired driving and other harmful reactions can also result.

In short, drugged driving is a dangerous activity that puts us all at risk.

Prevent Becoming a Victim

Safety improvements in newer vehicles such as better seat belts and air bags, and awareness campaigns to get people to use them, have done a lot to prevent traffic fatalities from all causes, including accidents involving drugs or alcohol. In addition, highway safety engineers have worked hard to make design improvements to highways to try to keep us all safer. However, there are things you can do to keep yourself and your family safer on the roads.

- **Do not drink and drive** and do not ride with anyone who has too much to drink. Statistically, it is usually themselves and their passengers who are harmed by drunk drivers.
- **Do not use illegal drugs.** Illegal or abused prescription drugs are involved in a large number of traffic deaths.
- **Volunteer to be a designated driver** and take that responsibility seriously; especially if you will be transporting your family and friends later.
- **Always use a safety belt** and insist that everyone in the car with you use theirs as well. Never put more people in a vehicle than there are safety belts.
- **Use four lane highways** whenever possible and avoid rural roads. On a four-lane highway you have a fighting chance of avoiding a head on crash with a drunk driver. On a two lane or rural road your chances are significantly decreased.
- **Avoid driving after midnight** (especially on Fridays and Saturdays). Also be aware of the "Happy Hour" crowd during the holiday season. Friday evenings can be very dangerous.

- **Drive defensively.** If the person in front of you or beside you is driving erratically, assume they are intoxicated and slow down to get away from them. Be aware of your surroundings and do not allow yourself to be distracted by your cell phone, CD/DVD player, or children in the backseat. Drivers using cellular phones are four times more likely to have an accident than other drivers.
- **Choose the safest vehicle you can afford.** Check the ratings in Consumer Reports and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for crash testing and safety features. Front and side air bags save lives.
- **Never drive when tired.** The dangers posed when overly tired are similar to those when intoxicated. A drunk or fatigued driver has slowed reactions and impaired judgment. A sleeping driver is essentially unconscious with no reaction time and no judgment.

How to avoid being the one driving under the influence

The best advice is and always will be do not drink and drive. However, there may be times that you find yourself in a situation where you will be having an alcoholic beverage and possibly driving later. Here are some guidelines to help keep your blood alcohol level low.

- Eat food while you drink. Food, especially high protein food such as meats and cheeses will help slow the absorption of alcohol into your body.
- A good guideline for most people is to limit consumption of alcohol beverages to one standard drink (not *one* in a large tumbler) per hour.
- Do not fool yourself. The contents of the typical bottle or can of beer, glass of wine, or liquor drink (mixed drink or straight liquor) each contain virtually identical amounts of pure alcohol.
- Skip a drink now and then. Having a non alcoholic drink between alcoholic ones will help keep your blood alcohol content level down, as does spacing out your alcoholic drinks.
- Be active rather than just sitting around and drinking. If you stay active you tend to drink less and to be more aware of any effects alcohol may be having on you.
- Beware of unfamiliar drinks. Some drinks, such as pina coladas and other fruit drinks, can be deceiving as you cannot taste the alcohol and therefore do not realize how much alcohol you are actually consuming.
- Be careful about prescription medications and alcohol. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about any precautions you may need to take in relation to any prescription drugs you are taking and their effect with alcohol.
- Never be afraid to call a cab, ask a sober friend to drive, or, if you are at someone's home, ask if you can stay a bit longer to sober up. Many communities will provide free cab rides to those who are intoxicated. If you tend to find yourself out without a designated driver, learn about how to call a cab before you start the party circuit.
- Do not believe myths about sobering up such as drinking coffee or taking a cold shower. The only thing that gets alcohol out of your system is time.

Remember, do not ever, ever drive if you, or anyone else, thinks that you may have had too much to drink. **It is always safest not to drink and drive.**