



# Alcohol and Driving

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## Alcohol, Other Drugs and Driving

Alcohol and other impairing drugs are involved in approximately 40 percent of all traffic crashes in which someone is killed each year. If you drink alcohol or use other impairing drugs and drive, even a little, your chances of being in a collision are much greater than if you did not drink any alcohol or use any other drugs.

If you are younger than 21 it is illegal to purchase, publicly possess and drink alcoholic beverages. Alcohol and other impairing drugs affect a person's ability to perceive surroundings, react to emergencies and skillfully operate a motor vehicle. For new drivers learning complex skills, the effects of alcohol and other impairing drugs are greater. All States have "zero tolerance" laws (no alcohol in the circulatory system) for drivers under 21.



## Effects of Alcohol and other Impairing Drugs

Alcohol and other drugs reduce the important skills you need to drive safely.

- *Judgment* – Judgment is a brain-centered activity that stores all of your experiences and knowledge so it can be used quickly when you face a new problem. Alcohol and other impairing drugs affect those areas of your brain that controls judgment. This is one reason why drinking alcohol and taking certain types of drugs is so dangerous.
- *Vision* – The most important sense you use in driving is vision. Alcohol and certain types of drugs can blur your vision, slow your ability to focus and cause double vision. Your vision helps you to determine how far away an object is and the object's relationship to your path of travel. Alcohol and other impairing drugs reduce the ability to judge distance, speed and the movement of other vehicles. With increasing impairment, you could drift across the centerline, wander from lane to lane, or even run off the roadway. Vision is affected for all drivers at a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) as low as .02 g/dl.
- *Color Distinction* – A lot of the information you receive on the roadway is from different colors such as traffic signs, signals and roadway markings. Alcohol and other impairing drugs reduce your ability to distinguish colors, which can be very dangerous.
- *Reaction Time* – Alcohol and other impairing drugs slows your ability to process information and respond to critical driving tasks. Alcohol and impairing drugs makes you drowsy and less alert to what is around you.



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Never let friends or relatives drive if they have been drinking. If a friend or relative has been drinking:

- take his/her keys away
- arrange for a driver who has not been drinking
- call a cab; or
- have them stay overnight

There is no way to get all the alcohol or other drugs out of the circulatory system in order to become sober quickly. Coffee, fresh air, cold showers or eating will not help to remove the alcohol or other drug combination from the circulatory system. Time is the only medically-proven method to remove alcohol or other drug combinations from the circulatory system. It takes about an hour for the body to get rid of one normal drink from the circulatory system. Therefore, if someone has had four normal drinks, the person should wait four hours or more before driving. Keep in mind that “sober” means that no alcohol or other impairing drugs are in the circulatory system of the body.

The best advice is to not drive a vehicle of any kind if alcohol or other drugs are consumed. Impairment starts with the first drink. Even one drink of alcohol can affect a person’s ability to operate a motor vehicle. With one or more drinks in the bloodstream a person could be arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

## Alcohol and the Law

If your BAC is .08 g/dl or higher you are in violation of the law if you drive. If you are arrested for drinking and driving, the penalties are severe. If you have a BAC of .08 or higher, your driver’s license and driving privileges may be suspended. If you are under 21, you can also be arrested for alcohol impairment at .02% g/dl. Even under .08 you are still impaired. Under the law you can still be convicted for driving impaired.



A BAC test measures how much alcohol is in your system and is usually determined by a breath test. A blood or urine test could also be required. You are required to take a BAC test if asked by a police officer due to implied consent laws. The implied consent law is based on the principle that when you get your driver’s license you have implicitly consented to a lawfully requested test to determine the alcohol content of the blood, breath, urine or other bodily substance if suspected of impaired driving.

If you are found guilty of an alcohol violation and it is your first conviction, you will be fined plus court costs and your license could be suspended. For second and subsequent convictions, the penalties are much worse. You could be sentenced to jail and your license could be suspended.

Information for this fact sheet was derived from:

ADTSEA Curriculum version 2.0

AAMVA Model Driver Manual