

Driving and Medications

On average, older adults take six prescription or over-the-counter medications a day. Many people also take herbal supplements. With this number of medications and changes in the body as people age, older adults are more prone to medication-related problems.

Many medications or combinations of medications and supplements have side effects that influence driving performance. These reactions include drowsiness, blurred vision, unsteadiness, inability to focus or pay attention, nausea, and fainting.

For example, taking a cold medication can cloud the brain's ability to process important driving cues and slow reaction time. The cold medication also may react with a prescription drug that doubles the effect. Slowed reactions can impact your ability to speed up fast enough to merge with traffic or stop quickly.

Good Practice:

- If you are taking a new medication or a new dose of your regular medication, take the first dose in a safe environment to determine if you have a reaction and the extent of any side effects. Don't drive until the body has adjusted to the medication.
- For some medications, you may not detect any effect. Ask your doctor if any of your medications cause drowsiness, forgetfulness, or euphoria (pleasant excitement). See if the doctor recommends testing of your reaction times or a driving assessment when you are on and off the medication. This testing can determine how much the medication harms your driving ability and at what level you are still a safe driver. Ask your physician about changing doses and timing of medications.
- Have a yearly review of your prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, supplements and herbals by your physician.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if alcohol increases the strength of your medications and if this reaction can seriously affect your ability to be a safe driver.
- Monitor yourself. Learn how your body reacts to medications and supplements by keeping track how you feel after you take the medication and how long am' reaction lasts.