

Stimulants

Amphetamines, cocaine, phenylpropanolamine, ephedrine and caffeine (often found in cold tablets and cough syrups) stimulate the central nervous system. Small amounts of these drugs generally make people who are tired feel more alert; however, repeated use of stimulants to combat fatigue will result in loss of coordination. Heavy amphetamine use may keep an individual aware or active for long stretches of time, but it will also make the driver edgy, less coordinated, and more likely to be involved in a traffic accident.

Over-the-Counter Drugs

Non-prescription drugs, such as cold tablets, cough syrups, allergy remedies, etc., purchased over-the-counter may contain antihistamines, alcohol, codeine, and other compounds that can be especially dangerous for drivers. You should read labels and pay attention to warnings (e.g., may cause drowsiness, do not operate machinery, caution against engaging in operations requiring alertness).

If you have questions about a particular drug or combination of drugs, check with your doctor or pharmacist.

It is important that you understand how YOU personally react to the drug you are using. Ask your doctor if the prescribed drug can affect your ability to drive.

Other Drugs

LSD, PCP, and other hallucinogens distort judgment and reality, cause confusion and panic, and can produce severe mental problems resulting in strange and violent behaviour. Clearly, individuals under the influence of these kinds of drugs should not drive.

Every Driver Should Know

Driving requires a combination of thought and motor skills, a great deal of common sense, and a concern for the safety of everyone on the road. Safe driving requires an observant eye, a steady hand, and a clear mind. Mixing drugs with driving is only asking for trouble. Why take the risk?

For further information, contact the
Prince Edward Island Department of
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Drugs and Driving

Why Take the Risk?



03TR06-7378



Transportation
and Public Works
Highway Safety
Division

Drugs and Driving

Why Take the Risk?

Millions of people take drugs every day and most are **unaware that many of these substances affect their driving skills**. Alcohol, tranquillizers, marijuana, and a variety of other drugs can affect the mental and physical skills needed for safe driving—even some over-the-counter medicines can affect driving.

The effects of a drug vary significantly from one individual to the next, and even vary in the same individual at different times. The driver's age, sex, weight, emotional state, and the amount of drug and when it was taken are all factors which influence the ability to drive safely.

Taking more than one drug at a time is **especially dangerous** because each one can add to the impact of the other. This is particularly true when one of the drugs is alcohol.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a mind-altering drug that works as a sedative and changes the way a person thinks and acts. **It affects judgment and coordination**. Transport Canada reports that in Canada in 1992, 1,582 fatally injured drivers were tested for alcohol and 48 per cent were found to have been drinking, and 40 per cent were legally impaired. In Prince

Edward Island, in 1995 there were 790 alcohol-related accidents resulting in seven fatalities. It is well known that alcohol **increases** the sedative effects of tranquillizers and barbiturates (sleeping pills). Mixing these drugs, on or off the road, is extremely hazardous.

Even caffeine, a stimulant in coffee and tea, which is supposed to help the drowsy driver stay alert, **cannot** make a drunk driver sober. Studies show that the caffeine does **not** improve an inebriated subject's driving. You simply have a wide-awake drunk on your hands.

Marijuana

Marijuana is also a mind-altering drug. Its use affects a wide range of skills needed for safe driving—quick thinking and reflexes are slowed, causing drivers difficulty in responding to sudden, unexpected events. Also, a driver's ability to "track" (staying in the lane) through curves, to brake quickly, and to maintain speed and proper distance between cars is affected.

Research clearly indicates that normal levels of driving performance are **not** regained for at least four to six hours after smoking a single marijuana cigarette. Drinking alcohol in combination with smoking marijuana greatly **increases the risk of accidents**.

Tranquillizers/Sedative-Hypnotics

Tranquillizers are central nervous system depressants (drugs which slow down the body)

and help relieve tension and anxiety. Major and minor tranquillizers, such as chlorpromazine (Thorazine) and diazepam (Valium), can have pronounced effects on driving skills.

Studies show that prescribed doses of tranquillizers can affect driving skills by slowing reaction time, interfering with eye-hand coordination and judgment. Warnings that caution against taking these medications while driving are often ignored. Recent research suggests that driving skills are most impaired in the first hour after a tranquillizer is taken.

Flurazepam (Dalmane) is a widely prescribed sleeping pill. Studies show that this drug accumulates in the body, and the build-up can impair driving skills, even the morning after. Elderly people must be especially careful when driving the day after taking this drug since the drug remains in the body longer than it does for a younger person.

Other sedative-hypnotic drugs, including barbiturates and Quaaludes, are powerful sedatives that calm people or help them sleep. Sleepy drivers are a hazard on the road. Mixing these drugs with alcohol can double the effects of both and is extremely dangerous.

If your doctor prescribes a tranquillizer or sedative, make it a point to discuss how this drug will affect your ability to drive safely.