

Substance Impaired Driving: A Challenging Education and Advice Topic

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SUBSTANCE IMPAIRED DRIVING

The law

In New Zealand, its illegal to drive impaired by any substance

SUBSTANCE IMPAIRED DRIVING

Definition

- › Drivers at risk of driving impaired due to the effects of medications (or drugs) used with or without alcohol
- › Impaired driving is when your body or emotions have been affected (usually temporarily) in a way that makes you an unsafe driver*

*New Zealand Transport Agency, 2015

▼ New Zealand study of 1000 killed drivers over 5 years

1 in 3 had impairing medications or drugs in their blood

Research shows that medications and/or drugs are a sizeable cause in **fatal** road crashes along with alcohol and speed*



* Poulsen, 2010

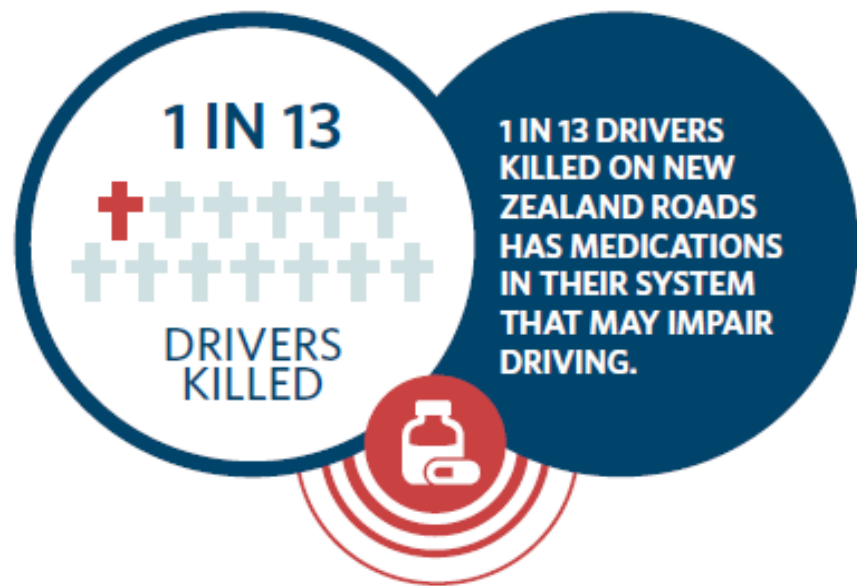


New Zealand study of 1000 killed drivers over 5 years

1 in 13 had impairing medications*

Further analysis shows that medications are an issue

- › Using a list of impairing medications.
- › In collaboration with ESR toxicologist Dr Helen Poulsen



*New Zealand Transport Agency, 2015



New Zealand drivers regularly use impairing medications

Use of impairing prescription medications is common

- › There are 9 Million new prescriptions that may impair driving for people of driving age in New Zealand, out of a total of 34 million new prescriptions
- › One in four prescription medications can impair driving*



1 IN 4
prescriptions are
for medication that
can impair driving

* Dowden, 2018a



New Zealand drivers regularly use impairing medications

Use of impairing medications is common

- › Every year two out of three drivers used prescription medications or over-the-counter medications that may impair*



* Dowden, 2018b




Medications & alcohol is common

Drivers drink alcohol while using medication

- › Most drivers don't realise what they taking medication and drinking alcohol could affect driving
- › And almost all New Zealanders of driving age drink alcohol regularly
- › 7 in 10 report drinking alcohol when taking medications/drugs*

* Dowden, 2018b



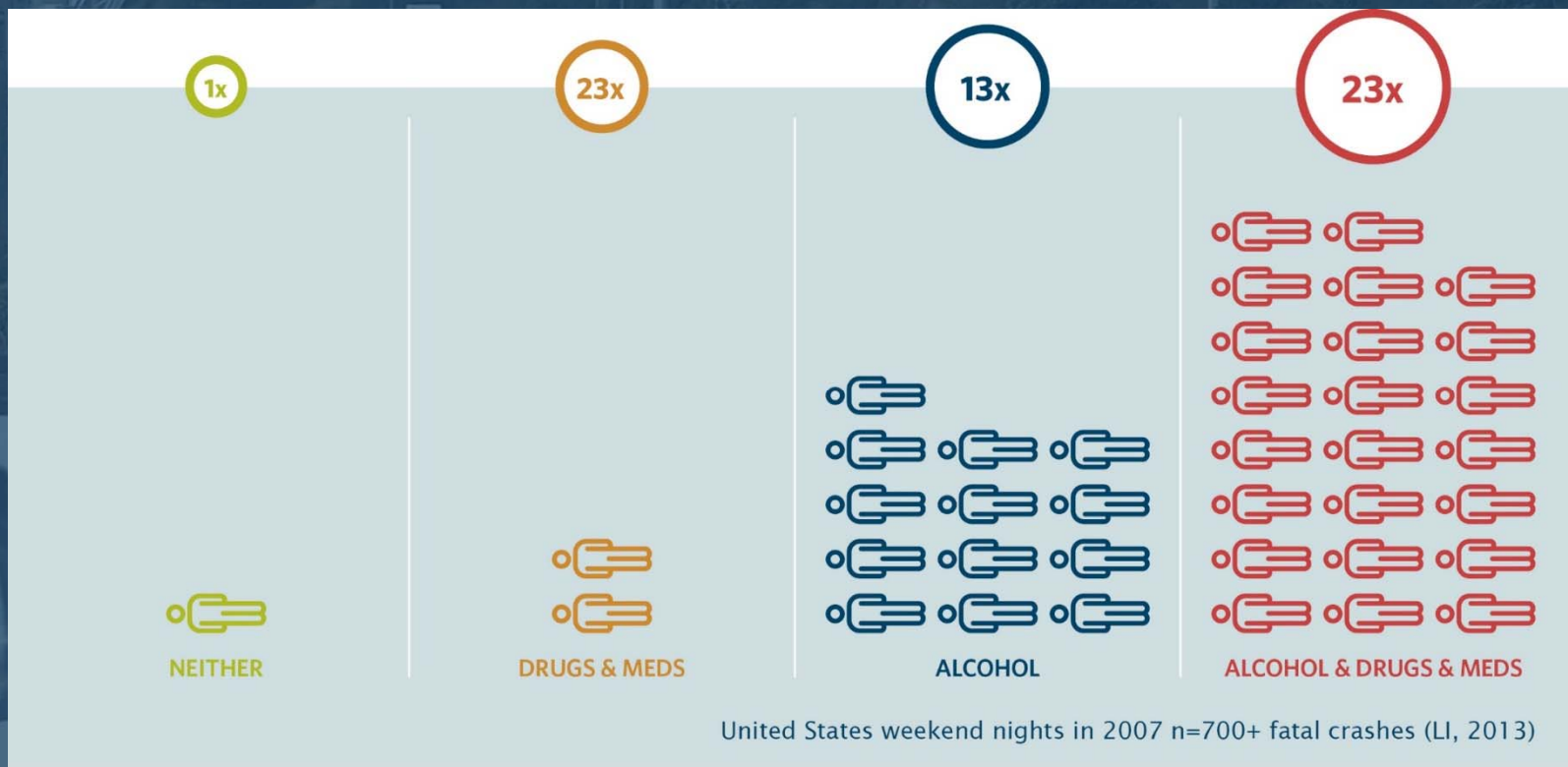
**POLYDRUG
USE: AN
INTERNATIONAL
STUDY**

Odds of a fatal Crash

Mixing alcohol with medications or drugs that impair driving can make drivers 23 times more likely to have a fatal crash than those that use neither (U.S.A)*

*Li, 2013

Odds of a fatal crash* For drivers who test positive for drugs/alcohol



United States weekend nights in 2007 n=700+ fatal crashes (LI, 2013)

*Li, 2013




**EXPERIMENTS –
DRIVER
SIMULATIONS
ETC.**

16 common New Zealand medications used for anxiety, pain, depression, insomnia, psychosis cause driving impairment

Long-acting benzodiazepines for insomnia

- › impairs 10hrs–17hrs later, may increase risk of crash*
- › 100,000+ new prescriptions**

*Leung, 2013 (Lorazepam) **Dowden, 2018a



**EXPERIMENTS –
DRIVER
SIMULATIONS
ETC.**


16 common New Zealand medications used for Medications used for anxiety, pain, depression, insomnia, psychosis cause driving impairment

Insomnia medication (zopiclone)*

- › causes marked impairment 10 hrs. after taken at bedtime
- › nearly half a million new prescriptions

*

Vermeeren et al. 2002



**EXPERIMENTS –
DRIVER
SIMULATIONS
ETC.**

16 common New Zealand medications used for Medications used for anxiety, pain, depression, insomnia, psychosis cause driving impairment

Low dose codeine/paracetamol*

- > impairs driving in 'elderly' (age 60 years)
- > common over-the-counter

*DRUID (2011).

IMPAIRING MEDICATIONS

Common prescription medications that may impair driving

- › Strong painkillers
- › Depression medications
- › Heart medications
- › Allergy medications
- › Sleeping tablets
- › Anti-psychotic medications
- › Epilepsy treatment
- › Nausea medications
- › Anxiety medications

*New Zealand Transport Agency, 2015

NEW ZEALAND DRIVER EDUCATION

Awareness of substance impaired driving is low

The law

- › Medications 'used as directed' - half (47%) don't know its illegal to drive impaired
- › Over-the-counter - half (47%) don't know

Educated about medications

- › Less than four in ten (38%) drivers recall ever being told their medications could impair


*Dowden (in press)

www.Medication | NZ Transport Agency

Information and access to resources for educators and drivers

Home > Safety > Driving safety >

Medication



Are you safe to drive? →

It can be unsafe to drive when taking medication which impairs/affects your driving ability. It's also against the law to drive when you're impaired.

Information for doctors, pharmacists and nurses – is your patient safe to drive? →

Substance impaired driving is a sizeable and serious problem. As a health professional you can help your patients make good choices about whether or not they're safe to drive.

DRIVER SHEETS

Driver information sheets and resources

Developed in partnership

- › Promotes driver responsibility (ask your health provider)
- › Increases understanding of impairment
- › Builds awareness of medications
- › Enhances knowledge of driver options

www.Medication | NZ Transport Agency

Videos
6 parts



Information for drivers taking medication

ARE YOU SAFE TO DRIVE?

Have a 'safe to drive' conversation with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.



It can be unsafe to drive when taking medication which impairs/affects your driving ability. IT'S AGAINST THE LAW TO DRIVE WHEN YOU'RE IMPAIRED.

Many prescribed medications (or those purchased over-the-counter) can impair your driving, as can many recreational drugs. It's important you talk honestly with your health practitioner about your medication (and anything else you're taking) so they can help you stay safe on the road.

Some of these prescription medications may impair your driving:

- Strong painkillers
- Depression medications
- Heart medications
- Allergy medications
- Sleeping tablets
- Anti-psychotic medications
- Epilepsy medications
- Addiction treatment
- Nausea medications
- Anxiety medications.

Not every medication in each type listed above will impair driving. Find out if you're at risk.

Impaired driving is when your body or emotions have been affected (usually temporarily) in a way that makes you an unsafe driver. You need to make sure you're safe to drive before you get in the car.



1 IN 4 prescriptions are for medication that can impair driving

Information for doctors, pharmacists and nurses.

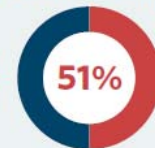
IS MY PATIENT SAFE TO DRIVE?



SUBSTANCE IMPAIRED DRIVING IS A SIZEABLE AND SERIOUS PROBLEM



OF ALL SCRIPTS ARE FOR MEDICATION THAT CAN IMPAIR DRIVING.³



OF DRIVERS DON'T RECALL BEING WARNED ABOUT POTENTIAL IMPAIRMENT.²



OF DRIVERS ARE NOT AWARE IT'S ILLEGAL TO DRIVE WHILE IMPAIRED BY MEDICATIONS.²



1 in 3 people killed on New Zealand roads has medications or drugs in their system that may impair driving.⁴



2 in 3 drivers used medications that may impair driving in the last 12 months.²



1 in 7 drivers report taking medications or drugs they felt could have affected their ability to drive safely in the past year.²

Road crashes caused by substance impaired driving, occur much more often in New Zealand than previously thought. People are uninformed about how medication and drugs can affect their driving.

As a health practitioner, you can help your patients to be informed about how their medication - and other substances they may be taking - can affect their driving. You can help them make good choices about whether or not they're safe to drive.

References: 1. [https://www.nzta.govt.nz](#)

Signs & symptoms

You need to have a 'safe to drive' conversation with your health practitioner about your medication. To avoid driving while impaired you may need to:

- avoid driving altogether when taking your medication
- consider avoiding driving at first when taking your medication
- not drink alcohol while taking your medication.

Before you drive, always check for any of these symptoms:

- Feeling drowsy/sleepy
- Blurred vision
- Headache
- Feeling weak
- Slowed reactions
- Dizziness
- Nausea, feeling sick
- Unable to focus or pay attention
- Being easily confused
- Slurred speech
- Having trouble forming a sentence
- Feeling wired and overconfident (although you may not notice yourself).

Be a responsible driver when taking medication:

- Always take medication according to the instructions.
- Don't stop taking medication because you want to be okay to drive.
- Check how you're feeling after you start a new medication. Talk to your health practitioner if you're concerned.
- Check whether you can drink alcohol when taking your medication.
- Ask your health practitioner how long the effects last. Some medications taken at night may affect you the next morning.
- Don't keep driving if you feel impaired. Call someone to pick you up or take a bus or taxi.
- Talk to your health practitioner about all medication or drugs you're taking - prescription, over-the-counter and recreational.



Not being able to drive doesn't have to disrupt your life. It's usually only temporary. Your health practitioner can help you find alternatives or could change your medication or dose so you're able to drive again.

IN THE LAST
12 MONTHS



2 OUT OF 3 DRIVERS
USED MEDICATION
THAT MAY IMPAIR
DRIVING

**Safe actions
driver can take**

Be a responsible driver when taking medication:

- **Always take medication according to the instructions.**
- **Don't stop taking medication because you want to be okay to drive.**
- **Check how you're feeling after you start a new medication. Talk to your health practitioner if you're concerned.**
- **Check whether you can drink alcohol when taking your medication.**
- **Ask your health practitioner how long the effects last. Some medications taken at night may affect you the next morning.**
- **Don't keep driving if you feel impaired. Call someone to pick you up or take a bus or taxi.**
- **Talk to your health practitioner about all medication or drugs you're taking – prescription, over-the-counter and recreational.**

Information for doctors, pharmacists and nurses.

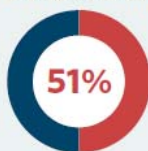
IS MY PATIENT SAFE TO DRIVE?



SUBSTANCE IMPAIRED DRIVING IS A SIZEABLE AND SERIOUS PROBLEM



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Road crashes caused by substance impaired driving, occur much more often in New Zealand than previously thought. People are uninformed about how medication and drugs can affect their driving.

As a health practitioner, you can help your patients to be informed about how their medication – and other substances they may be taking – can affect their driving. You can help them make good choices about whether or not they're safe to drive.

What is substance impaired driving?

Substance impaired driving is when a person's ability to drive a car is affected because they have taken a drug or medication, a combination of these or combined them with alcohol. It's illegal to drive while impaired and NZ Police will enforce this law.

References:

1. Goshall LJ et al (2003) Drug use and fatal motor vehicle crashes: a case-control study.
2. NZ Transport Agency (2016). For NZTA Substance Impaired Driving Project. Memo: Baseline Driver Survey.
3. NZ Transport Agency (2016). For NZTA Substance Impaired Driving Project. Memo: Analysis of summary data from the pharmaceutical collection year to July 2014.
4. Probst, Helen (2003) Alcohol and other drug use in New Zealand drivers 2004 to 2009.

HAVE THE 'SAFE TO DRIVE' CONVERSATION WITH YOUR PATIENTS.

Give your affected patients a copy of the 'Are you safe to drive?' leaflet, tick their medication and possible symptoms and discuss the following:



- Let your patients know **if their medication could affect their driving.**
- Make sure they **check for symptoms** each time they drive.
- Advise **how long** the effects of their medication may last.
- Tell them whether they should avoid **alcohol** while taking their medication as it may multiply the risk.
- Advise them **not to stop taking their medication** so they can drive.
- Talk about the **options**, such as trying a different medication or dose, or taking their medication at a different time.

You might also want to raise one of these:

- The **decision to drive** is their responsibility.
- **Reaction times** are really slowed when they're impaired.
- 'Impairment' **may only be temporary.**
- **Other drugs** like cannabis or over-the-counter medication may affect their driving.
- Car **insurance** may be affected if they drive impaired when they've been told not to drive on strong medication.
- Discuss **alternatives to driving** such as taking the bus or getting a lift. Talk about how long they may have to do this.
- Consider the **effects when they change their routine** – such as evening activity or a very early start.
- Make a plan for **emergency night-time driving.**

Five types of medication most often prescribed by New Zealand doctors make up three-quarters of those that may impair driving.

- **Analgesics**
- **Antidepressants**
- **Heart medications** beta blockers/calcium channel blockers
- **Antihistamines**
- **Sedatives.**

Five less common prescription medications make up most of the rest.

- **Antipsychotics**
- **Anti-epilepsy drugs**
- **Substance dependence treatments**
- **Anti-nausea medication**
- **Anxiolytics.**

These 10 account for over 95 percent of prescription medications that may impair driving in New Zealand. Talk to your patient about how their driving could be affected if they're:

- taking one or more of these medications, or
- taking some of the variants sold as 'pharmacy only', or
- taking over-the-counter medication such as antihistamines or cold and flu preparations.



1 IN 3 DRIVERS KNOWS NONE OR ONLY ONE OF THE SIGNS OF IMPAIRED DRIVING²

Some signs or symptoms of medication impaired driving:

- Feeling drowsy/sleepy
- Blurred vision
- Headache
- Feeling weak
- Slowed reactions
- Dizziness
- Nausea, feeling sick
- Unable to focus or pay attention
- Being easily confused
- Having trouble forming a sentence
- Slurred speech
- Feeling wired and overconfident (although a person may not notice this themselves).

THE RISK MULTIPLIES IF YOU MIX ALCOHOL WITH

If you have further queries, you can

Patient education and advice

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- Car **insurance** may be affected if they drive impaired when they've been told not to drive on strong medication.
- Discuss **alternatives to driving** such as taking the bus or getting a lift. Talk about how long they may have to do this.
- Consider the **effects when they change their routine** - such as evening activity or a very early start.
- Make a plan for **emergency night-time driving**.



**If you are taking medication and driving,
talk with your health professional**

The background image shows a road winding through a hilly landscape. A police car with 'POLICE' and 'HKE477' on its front is parked on the left. A white SUV with 'JEL502' on its front is parked on the right. A sign on the right side of the road reads 'VICTORIA FLAT RD'.

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