

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS

MENTAL CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT DRIVING

We all know that physical conditions such as fatigue or eyesight problems can affect your ability to drive safely. Mental conditions, such as emotions, stress or attitude can also affect your driving safety.

Rx for Mental Conditions

Knowing that a condition exists is the first step toward controlling its affect on your driving. If you recognize the signs of excess stress, emotions or attitude as occasional traveling companions, ask yourself what you can do to keep mental conditions from affecting your driving.

Stress

We can't avoid some stress in our lives. But too much stress can interfere with your driving. Stress creates physical and mental fatigue, slowing your reaction time and reducing your ability to concentrate. It may cause you to behave erratically or be less tolerant of other drivers and road conditions.

Emotions

Anger, grief and worry can rob you of your concentration and your desire to drive safely. Even positive emotions, like happiness at a job promotion or an impending vacation, can result in mental distraction.

Attitude

Some attitudes make us better drivers. Others, such as aggressiveness or inattentiveness can get in the way of our safety.

Coping With Mental Conditions

- Whenever you get behind the wheel, ask yourself if it is safe for you to drive right now.
- Before you drive, sit in your vehicle and take a few deep breaths. Remind yourself that your safety depends on your being calm and rational.
- Stay within the speed limit. Resist the urge to act out tensions by going too fast or too close to other vehicles.
- Try to avoid driving in areas, such as those with heavy traffic, that make you tense.
- Cope with stress in your daily life: do something physical such as walking or jogging. Or take a course in stress reduction.
- Ask yourself what changes you can make in your life to better cope with stress, anger or other mental states. Then start making these changes. Talking things out with a friend can help, too.