

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, alcohol-related crashes are about nine times more likely to result in a fatality. Since about 60 percent of adults in our country drink alcoholic beverages at least once in a while, it's worth knowing just how alcohol affects your ability to drive safely.

The Dangers of Alcohol

Alcohol is a drug, a depressant that affects both your body and your mind. After drinking any amount of alcohol, your coordination and reaction time are slower than when sober. Alcohol can also distort your vision, make you sleepy and give you a false sense of security that results in poor judgment. In short, alcohol robs the driver of the very qualities needed for defensive driving—alertness, foresight, judgment and skill.

You May Think You're in Control...

One of the dangers of alcohol is that you may think you're in control of your driving, but you're not. If you're a habitual drinker, you may not feel drunk after a few drinks. But your blood alcohol level will show that you are. If friends tell you that you shouldn't drive, listen to them. You'll thank them when you've sobered up. Having as few as three or four drinks can double your chances of being in an accident. After seven or eight drinks, those odds increase 25 times.

Alcohol and the Law

Even if you're not involved in a collision while driving under the influence, the personal risks are high. Most states have tough laws, against driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. In some states you can lose your license for a year after one conviction. Or you may have to go to jail, pay heavy fines, or attend alcohol education classes. A drunk driving conviction can cost you your job and the respect of your friends and family. Is it worth the risk?

Time Is the Only Cure

How soon after drinking is it safe to drive? The answer depends on how much you weigh, how much you've had to eat, and how your body handles alcohol. But on average, your body needs at least one hour for each drink you've had, to process and get rid of the alcohol. There's no other way to do it. Black coffee won't do it, and neither will a cold shower or other so-called remedies. Only time will make you sober enough to drive.