



DRIVING: UNDER THE INFLUENCE



# Driving Under the Influence - of Allergy Medicine

With allergy season officially starting, you should be aware that some over-the-counter allergy drugs can seriously impair your ability to drive a Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV).

University of Iowa researchers who tested allergy sufferers in a driving stimulator found that the antihistamine diphenhydramine (found in many allergy and cold medications) significantly impaired a driver's ability to follow, steer, and maintain the correct lane. The study showed that diphenhydramine has more significant impact on driving performance than alcohol does.

Researchers said that of the 39 million Americans who suffer from hay fever and allergies only 4.8 million take prescription medications. The remainder of these folks go without treatment or take over-the-counter medications. These medications may be effective, but they often come with warnings stating drowsiness may occur and to use caution when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery.

**Here is a partial list of legal drugs that can - in the right amount - impair your ability to drive.**

- Anti-anxiety medication
- Amphetamines
- Barbiturates
- Stimulants
- Narcotic pain medications
- Allergy medicines
- Blood sugar medicines
- Antidepressants
- Tranquilizers
- Blood pressure medicines
- Motion sickness medication
- Ulcer medication
- Antibiotics
- Anti-seizure medicines
- Paregoric
- Anti-nausea medicine
- Sedatives
- Cough syrups
- Alcohol-containing medicines
- Caffeine-containing medicines
- Decongestants

**Researchers say even if you don't feel drowsy on allergy medications, you can still be impaired.**

When drivers take over the counter medications they often forget that the medication has effects on their cognitive and motor abilities. It doesn't usually cross their minds that they are taking a drug and will be impaired. Even if they read the warning, it's common to assume that it only applies a few certain people and that "do not operate heavy machinery" means farm equipment or tractors, forgetting that CMV's should be included as well. Also, many drugs carry warnings about drowsiness or dizziness that people ignore. However, this is a serious problem that leads to thousands of vehicle crashes each year.

**The danger of getting behind the wheel of a CMV when a driver is too tired to drive can be fatal.**

Drugs impair our bodies in a variety of ways. They may blur our vision; make us tired or too excited; alter depth perception; make us see or hear things that may not be there; raise or lower blood pressure; react too quickly, too slowly, or not at all. They cause problems with concentrating on the task at hand. These problems can result from taking any type of drug: illegal, prescription or over-the-counter. When our brain function is altered, our muscle and nerve function changes.

**Antihistamines - which block allergic reactions - slow down reaction time and impair coordination.**

Over-the-counter decongestants can cause drowsiness, anxiety, and dizziness. Drowsy driving is responsible for an estimated 100,000 traffic crashes and about 1,500 deaths every year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Common prescription drugs (including medications to treat allergies, pain, diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, ulcers, depression, anxiety disorders, and insomnia) can cause drowsiness, affect vision and other skills that can be serious hazards on the road.

Over-the-counter drugs such as cold and cough medicines, antihistamines, drugs to prevent nausea or motion sickness, pain relievers, decongestants, and diuretics can cause drowsiness or dizziness that can impair a driver's skills and reflexes.

Some drugs may make you feel alert and confident in your driving. In reality of the situation may be quite different. Drugs can fool you into believing you are in control of your driving when you are, in fact, impaired.



To avoid harming yourself or others, partner with your physician and pharmacist to learn information regarding your medication's side effects, and what drugs are usually safe to combine-especially behind the wheel. Never take more than the prescribed dose, or take anyone else's medicine. Ask for non-sedating forms of your prescriptions if you are a professional driver. Allow your body time to adjust to new medications before you drive. Most importantly, each of us is responsible for knowing the signs and symptoms of being drug impaired before we get behind the wheel of any vehicle.

For more information including side effects of any drug go to [www.drugs.com](http://www.drugs.com)

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