Healthy Living

The dangers of impaired driving

Impaired driving poses a serious risk to everyone on the road, but it's a threat that is entirely preventable. Whether impairment stems from illegal drugs, alcohol, marijuana, or prescription medications, it can significantly affect the reflexes and skills drivers need to make safe decisions behind the wheel. Slower reaction times, poor coordination, reduced attention, and impaired judgment can transform a typical trip into a life-threatening situation, warns the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration advises that crashes involving an alcohol impaired driver account for approximately 30 percent of all traffic fatalities in the United States in a given year. That works out to roughly one death every 42 minutes.

But the dangers do not just involve the driver of the vehicle. They extend to passengers, occupants of other cars and trucks, pedestrians, and cyclists — all of whom can be become innocent victims. The CDC says that though the majority of people killed in crashes involving alcohol-impaired drivers are the drivers themselves, 40 percent include passengers and others.

Alcohol isn't the only concern. Drugs also can interfere with drivers' ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. Cannabis is now legal in many areas, and is known for slowing reaction time, distorting perception and impairing decision-making. Prescription and over-the-counter medications can cause drowsiness, blurred vision or even impaired coordination as well. When multiple substances are combined, impairment may increase.

What's more, many people underestimate their level of impairment, choosing to get behind the wheel even after consuming some substance. The CDC reports that, in 2023, an estimated 16.5 percent of Americans age 16 and older drove under the influence of alcohol, while 12.1 million reported driving under the influence of cannabis.

Preventing impaired driving is a serious concern that takes advanced planning and diligence. Anyone who intends to drink or consume a substance that can affect driving needs to arrange for a sober driver, use a rideshare service or take public transportation.

There is no way to make impaired driving safe. The safest and simplest solution is the most effective: never drive impaired.



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