



Want more information on drugs and driving? Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS). Telephone (08) 9442 5000 or country callers toll-free 1800 198 024. ADIS is a confidential 24 hour telephone service providing up-to-date information and counselling about alcohol and other drug use.



Drugs and driving
don't mix.

DRUGS AND DRIVING DON'T MIX

You've probably got the message about the dangers of drinking and getting behind the wheel, but mixing drugs and driving can be just as dangerous.

Being under the influence of more than one drug, including alcohol, puts you at even more serious risk of having a car crash. If you're not worried about yourself then think about your friends and others on the road. Imagine being responsible for another person being maimed for life. Why risk having to deal with the consequences for the rest of your life.

This brochure contains information about how and why different drugs can affect your driving.

WHY DRUGS AND DRIVING DON'T MIX

HOW PSYCHOACTIVE DRUGS CAN AFFECT DRIVING ABILITY

A psychoactive drug is a drug that affects the mind or behaviour and because of this can impact on driving ability.

There are three main categories of drugs based on their effects on the body: stimulants, hallucinogens and depressants. They each have different effects on driving ability.

Remember that the driver may not realise just how much their driving ability is affected until they are placed in a situation where it is tested. By this stage it may be too late!

STIMULANTS

Ecstasy ('E', Bickies, Pills, Vitamins, XTC, Eccies, Love drug, Disco biscuits, MDMA)

Ecstasy is:

■ a stimulant with hallucinogenic properties; and ■ usually sold as small, coloured tablets or capsules with stamped shapes or 'brands'. Common 'brands' include Mitsubishi, White Butterfly and Crown.

The effects

The effects can last about four to six hours if swallowed, and less if injected or snorted. Ecstasy can temporarily exaggerate feelings of wellbeing, happiness, euphoria, confidence and energy; and distorts sensations of sight, sound and touch.

It can also cause:

■ increased heart rate and blood pressure ■ increased body temperature ■ increased breathing rate ■ anxiety, agitation and panic ■ nausea, vomiting ■ excessive thirst ■ extreme dehydration ■ sensations of floating ■ paranoia ■ irrational behaviour ■ distorted and blurred vision ■ jaw clenching and teeth grinding ■ confusion ■ loss of coordination ■ uncontrolled tremors, convulsions (fits) ■ urinary retention (not being able to go to the toilet) ■ rhabdomyolysis (muscle meltdown) ■ hallucinations ■ sleeplessness.

The effects on the driver:

■ gives the driver a false sense of confidence ■ increases risk-taking behaviour ■ distorts visual perceptions, which makes it difficult to judge distances ■ decreases ability to coordinate the appropriate reaction when driving ■ tiredness associated with an inability to sleep can greatly affect the driver's reflexes and ability to concentrate on driving ■ can increase the risk of having a crash.

Cocaine (Coke, Charlie, Snow, White Lady, Freebase, Crack, Rock, C)

Cocaine is:

■ a stimulant that speeds up the activity of certain chemicals in the brain and also has some effects of an anaesthetic; and ■ usually sold as a white powder.

'Freebase' and 'crack' are stronger forms of cocaine. They are usually smoked and look like small, yellow/white, oily rocks or crumbly, white flakes.

The effects

The effects of cocaine can last from a few minutes to a few hours, depending on how it is used. Effects can include exaggerated feelings of alertness, confidence and energy.

It can also cause:

■ anxiety, irritability and suspiciousness ■ uncontrolled tremors, convulsion ('fits') ■ aggressive behaviour, violence ■ depression ■ confusion ■ fainting ■ loss of appetite ■ hallucinations ■ paranoia ■ increased heart rate and blood pressure ■ increased body temperature ■ increased breathing rate.

The effects on the driver:

■ gives the driver a false sense of confidence ■ rash decision making and exaggerated confidence can lead to increased risk-taking behaviour ■ does not increase driving ability or driver's coordination ■ tiredness associated with an inability to sleep can greatly affect the driver's reflexes and ability to concentrate on driving ■ can increase the risk of having a crash.

HALLUCINOGENS

Amphetamines including Dexamphetamines (Speed, Goey, Whizz, Ice, Uppers, Go, Zip, Dexies)

Amphetamines including Dexamphetamines are:

■ commonly known as 'speed'; ■ stimulants that affect the activity of certain chemicals in the brain; and ■ usually sold as white, beige or yellow powder but are also sold as tablets, liquid in capsules or in crystal like form (ice).

The effects

The effects can last from two to five hours and may include increased alertness, confidence and energy, reduced appetite, feelings of being powerful or superior, and talkativeness.

They can also cause:

■ anxiety, suspiciousness ■ panic attacks ■ pale skin ■ headaches, dizziness ■ restlessness ■ shaking ■ hostility, aggression, irritability ■ psychosis (a serious break with reality, hallucinations and delusions) ■ increased heart rate and blood pressure ■ increased rate of breathing ■ sleeplessness.

The effects on the driver:

■ gives the driver a false sense of confidence ■ rash decision making and exaggerated confidence can lead to increased risk-taking behaviour ■ does not increase driving ability or driver's coordination ■ tiredness associated with an inability to sleep can greatly affect the driver's reflexes and ability to concentrate on driving ■ can increase the risk of having a crash.

Amphetamines

LSD and other hallucinogens (Acid, Trips, Micro Dots, Tabs)

LSD is:

■ an hallucinogen that can alter perceptions and cause hallucinations (seeing or hearing something that is not there). ■ usually sold on small pieces of absorbent paper decorated with designs such as smiley faces and cartoons. It may also be sold on sugar cubes, small squares of gelatine or in capsule, tablet or liquid form.

Other Hallucinogens include:

■ Psilocybin (magic mushrooms), Peyote Cactus (mescaline) ■ ecstasy (a stimulant) and cannabis (a depressant), which can have hallucinogenic properties.

The effects

The effects can start within thirty to sixty minutes and may last between six and twenty-four hours and can include intense distorted sensory experiences. These experiences can be frightening and unpredictable.

They can also cause:

■ increase in heart rate and blood pressure ■ increase in body temperature and sweating ■ dizziness ■ sleepiness ■ nausea ■ tension, anxiety, panic ■ paranoia ■ loss of coordination.

The effects on the driver:

■ distort driver's visual perceptions making it difficult to judge distances and speed ■ decreases ability to coordinate the appropriate reaction when driving ■ tiredness associated with an inability to sleep can greatly affect the driver's reflexes and ability to concentrate on driving ■ can increase the risk of having a crash.

LSD

DEPRESSANTS

Heroin (Hammer, Smack)

Heroin is:

■ a depressant. It affects the body's central nervous system by slowing down the activity in the brain. This slows down the whole body, including breathing and heart rate, and can result in death from overdose; and ■ usually sold as a white to brownish crystalline powder.

The Effects

Effects usually last between two and four hours. Heroin can cause temporary feelings of wellbeing, pain relief, slower heart rate, shallow breathing, nausea and vomiting.

It can also cause:

■ blurred vision ■ slower information processing ■ constipation ■ sleepiness ■ loss of balance and coordination ■ loss of concentration ■ pupils narrow to pin points ■ skin cold to touch ■ coma and death.

The effects on the driver:

■ slows the driver's reaction time ■ distorts driver's perceptions of distance and speed ■ greatly reduces ability to concentrate ■ decreases ability to coordinate appropriate reaction when driving ■ greatly increases the risk of having a crash.

Heroin

Cannabis

Cannabis (Grass, mull, pot, dope, weed, gunga, leaf, smoke, green)

Cannabis is:

■ is a depressant that can also have hallucinogenic properties ■ marijuana is a dried greenish-brown leaf or flower from the cannabis plant ■ hashish is a brown to black resin ■ hashish oil is a reddish brown oil.

The effects

Effects can last up to five hours. Cannabis can cause temporary feelings of wellbeing, loss of inhibitions, loss of concentration and increased appetite.

It can also cause:

■ impaired balance ■ slower reflexes ■ increased heart rate ■ loss of coordination ■ hesitancy ■ confusion and anxiety ■ restlessness ■ detachment from reality ■ hallucinations ■ paranoia and panic attacks.

The effects on the driver:

■ hesitancy over reactions ■ slower reaction time ■ distorts driver's perceptions of distance and speed ■ greatly reduces ability to concentrate ■ decreases ability to coordinate appropriate reaction when driving.

Alcohol

Alcohol is:

■ a depressant. It affects the body's central nervous system by slowing down the activity in the brain. This slows down the whole body, including breathing and heart rate; and ■ sold in a wide variety of beverages.

The Effects

As a guide it takes approximately one hour for the body to process a standard drink. Effects from alcohol may include temporary relief from pain, feelings of wellbeing, loss of inhibitions and loss of concentration.

It can cause:

■ nausea and vomiting ■ loss of balance and coordination ■ poor muscle control ■ blurred vision ■ slurred speech ■ coma and death.

The effects on the driver:

■ slows the driver's reaction time ■ distorts driver's perceptions ■ greatly reduces ability to concentrate ■ decreases ability to coordinate appropriate reaction when driving ■ greatly increases the risk of having a crash.

Alcohol

Tranquillisers

Benzodiazepines and Tranquillisers

Benzodiazepines and tranquilisers are:

■ depressants ■ Benzo's are sometimes referred to as minor tranquilisers, sleepers, benzo's or sleeping tablets; and ■ sold as tablets and capsules.

The effects

Effects can last between five and twenty-four hours, dependent on whether it is short acting like temazepam or long acting like diazepam. Effects from benzodiazepines and tranquilisers can include temporary relief of pain and sedation.

They can also cause:

■ impaired coordination ■ impaired reaction time ■ difficulty judging distances and speed.

The effects on the driver:

■ slows the driver's reaction time ■ distorts driver's perceptions ■ decreases ability to coordinate appropriate reaction when driving.

Always read instructions on medication packaging or consult your doctor to find out how long medication is likely to be active in the body and therefore likely to impact on driving ability.

Effects of Polydrug use on driving ability

Polydrug use occurs when more than one drug is mixed at the same time so that both are active in the body. This can include alcohol, prescription and/or illicit drugs.

Polydrug use can occur in the following situations:

■ When two or more psychoactive drugs are used at the same time or on the same occasion. This includes alcohol, prescription and/or illicit drugs. ■ Often illicit drugs contain more than one drug. Drug manufacturers will do this to save money by using different cheaper chemicals, or to achieve a different effect.

To avoid unintended polydrug use with medications always follow instructions from your doctor or the instructions on medication packaging.

Important facts on mixing alcohol, prescription and/or illicit drugs and driving:

■ Remember that there is a greater chance of harm if more than one drug, including alcohol, is used at the same time. This is especially the case when drugs of unknown content and purity are combined. ■ Stimulants and depressants have a dangerous masking effect on each other. For example, if someone has taken a drug like speed and has also been drinking alcohol they may not feel intoxicated. If that person were to drive they could be way over the alcohol driving limit and their driving would be affected by the influence of alcohol as well as the other drug. ■ Stimulants when combined with other stimulants greatly increase the associated side effects causing a greater false sense of confidence and risk-taking behaviour. ■ A depressant combined with another depressant dangerously increases the associated side effects, drastically slowing reaction time and distorting the driver's perception. ■ Hallucinogens when combined with any drug can be very unpredictable and dangerous. This is because they can cause visual distortion, including perceptions of speed and distance and greatly limit the accuracy of actions when driving.

Polydrug driving greatly increases your chances of having a crash!

Other issues relating to drug driving

Drugs affect people differently

The way a person experiences drugs depends on many things. It depends on the drug (type, amount, purity and method of use), the person (their mood, body size, personality, expectations, sex, health, experience and if other drugs have been taken) and the setting (people around, surroundings, place and occasion). The setting can change very quickly when driving. The drug's effect on the person's driving ability can be unpredictable and difficult to judge until it is too late. It is safer to avoid such a situation.

Purity and content

Often drugs, particularly ecstasy and speed, are made illegally in 'backyard labs'. There are no controls on strength or purity, and to save money, manufacturers often cut or mix drugs with cheaper ingredients.

The following ingredients were found in ecstasy when it was seized and analysed by Western Australian police:

■ GBH (anaesthetic) ■ piperonyl butoxide (insecticide) ■ ketamine/Special K (anaesthetic) ■ xalyzine (sedative/muscle relaxant) ■ carbaryl (pesticide) ■ novocaine (anaesthetic) ■ glucose (sugar) ■ caffeine ■ starch (carbohydrate) ■ ephedrine ■ quinine (stimulant) ■ PMA (toxic amphetamine) ■ DXM (cough syrup) ■ Morphine (pain killer) ■ Strychnine (poison) ■ Benzodiazepines (tranquillisers) ■ Heroin ■ Amphetamines ■ Cocaine ■ LSD.

Many of these ingredients can cause bad side-effects, including vomiting, convulsions, dehydration, agitation, respiratory problems, dizziness, confusion, high blood pressure, hallucinations, extremely high body temperature, excessive sweating, coma and death.

Because you cannot predict what is in illegally made drugs, you cannot predict the effects that certain drugs will have on your body or driving ability. It is safer not to do drugs and drive.

Stay Safe

If you take drugs then drive your chances of having a crash increase.

If you take a drug in combination with alcohol or other drugs, your chances of having a crash are even greater.

If you mix drugs and alcohol not only do your chances of having a crash increase, but with some drugs you are much more likely to underestimate your blood alcohol concentration and as a result get picked up for drink driving.

Remember these tips to plan ahead and avoid the risk:

1. Think about your travel arrangements before you go out.
2. If it is not safe to drive, stay the night.
3. Before you go out, nominate someone in your group to take the responsibility to ensure everyone gets home safely.
4. Make sure you always have money to catch a taxi/bus/train home.
5. Keep a phone card on you at all times just in case you get stuck without any money and need to be picked up.
6. Always look out for your mates, you don't want anything to happen to them.
7. Always make sure that a driver is safe to drive. If they are not safe to drive, catch a cab or get a lift with someone who's straight.
8. Have a personal rule that you don't take drugs and drive, and that you don't go in a car with a driver who is on drugs.

Legalities

In Western Australia it is against the law for anyone to drive under the influence of a psychoactive drug. A psychoactive drug is a drug that affects the mind or behaviour, and because of this, can impact on driving ability. Breaking the law can lead to disqualification from driving, fines and/or imprisonment.