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Managing risk

Managing risk



Driving involves risk – a risk that you may crash and that you or others may be injured or killed. Good drivers aim to reduce and manage this risk.

Getting at least 120 hours of supervised driving experience as a learner driver will get you well on the way to being a safer driver.

Some things increase the risk of crashing or being seriously hurt for all drivers, and especially for new drivers:

- driving when affected by alcohol or drugs
- speeding
- using mobile phones and other electronic devices
- passengers in your car
- other types of distractions inside and outside your car
- fatigue – driving when tired
- not wearing a seatbelt
- poor vehicle maintenance.

Alcohol and drugs

Alcohol, drugs and some medicines reduce your ability to drive safely.

- You are much more likely to be involved in a crash if you are affected by alcohol. Your risk of crashing increases as your blood alcohol level increases. A driver with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05 has double the risk of crashing.
 - Learner and probationary drivers must stick to zero BAC. This means no alcohol at all. There is absolutely no exception to this rule.
 - There are severe penalties for any driver who commits a drink driving offence. Anyone whose licence and/or learner permit is cancelled for a drink driving offence will have to fit an alcohol interlock device for a period of at least 6 months as a condition of relicensing.
 - Alcohol can remain in your system for some time after you finish drinking. Drivers often test above zero BAC in the morning after drinking the night before. More information on alcohol and road safety can be found on pages 71-75.
- Different drugs will affect you in different ways, but many have a bad effect on your driving. Driving while impaired by drugs is illegal. Like alcohol, there are no exceptions to this rule (see pages 75-77).
 - Many prescription and over-the-counter medicines can affect your ability to drive safely. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about how your medicine may affect your driving. Don't just rely on what your friends say.
 - Mixing alcohol, drugs or medicines together is even worse than any one of them by itself. A driver who has had a few drinks and used some cannabis will drive as dangerously as a very drunk driver. The same is true for other combinations of alcohol, drugs and certain medicines.

Don't mix driving with alcohol, drugs or medicines.

To avoid the risks plan ahead:

- organise someone to drive who stays alcohol and drug free
- stay over rather than drive home
- arrange to be picked up by a friend or relative
- use public transport or take a taxi.

Managing risk



Speed

There is a clear link between speed and crashes. The faster you go the greater your risk of having a crash. Speed is a factor in almost 20% of fatal crashes and about 30% of crashes involving only one vehicle – such as running off the road. Speed also increases how seriously injured you will be if you do have a crash.

Speeding is riskier for new solo drivers. Going faster than other traffic reduces your margin for error. As a new solo driver speeding gives you less time to do all the things you have to do, such as:

- scanning the road
- anticipating possible hazards
- making the right decisions for each situation.

More information on speed can be found on pages 79 and 83.

Mobile phones and other electronic devices

Any use of a mobile phone including text messaging while driving is dangerous because it takes your attention away from the road and affects your driving. Anything that takes your attention away from driving and your eyes off the road will increase your risk of having a crash. This even applies to older, more experienced drivers.

- Using a mobile phone causes you to:
 - wander in and out of your lane
 - follow too close to the vehicle in front of you
 - miss traffic lights and other signals.
- Talking on a mobile phone, even a hands-free one, increases your chance of a crash.

Fact

Texting while driving is dangerous because it takes your eyes off the road.

The rules are straightforward.

- Learners, P1 and P2 probationary licence holders are not allowed to use a hand-held or hands-free mobile phone while driving, and are not allowed to send or read any text messages.
- Fully licensed drivers must not use a mobile phone to make or receive calls while driving, unless it is securely fixed in a holder or can be remotely operated.

It helps to set the message on your phone to make it clear to callers that you will not answer a call while driving.

You avoid the temptation of answering a phone by:

- switching the phone off
- putting the phone on silent
- putting the phone out of reach when driving.

Managing risk

If you have to make or receive a call, pull over safely and park. Do not stop in an emergency lane to use a phone as this is illegal.

Your mobile phone is not the only electronic device that can distract you. You could be distracted by using or reaching for:

- a CD player or radio
- your passenger's phone
- DVD players or other visual display units (VDU)
- GPS navigation systems
- iPods and other MP3 players
- handheld computers (PDAs and tablets) and computers.

You can reduce the risk by:

- not having distracting devices in your car, especially just after you get your P licence
- getting used to one or two distractions, such as the radio or a CD, late in your learner period while you still have the support of a supervising driver

- making any changes to devices (setting up your GPS, starting the CD, setting the radio) before you start driving
- using spoken directions from your GPS rather than trying to look at the map while driving.

It is illegal to have a visual display unit (such as a DVD player) operating so you can see it from the driver's seat – even when the car is stopped, but not parked. The only exception is for drivers' aids, such as navigation devices mounted to the car. Also you must not have a visual display unit which may distract another driver. The penalty can include a fine and possible suspension of your licence.

Passengers

Passengers can distract you and might increase your risk of having a crash. You can reduce the risk by:

- keeping the conversation to a minimum – it is OK to ask passengers to be quiet while you concentrate on driving
- ignoring any conversation when you need to concentrate hard on your driving
- recognising situations where you need extra concentration – such as intersections, school zones or heavy traffic
- reducing your speed
- leaving a bigger gap between your vehicle and the one ahead to give you more space and time to react to a hazard
- asking passengers not to use their mobile phone while you are driving unless it is an emergency
- being a responsible passenger yourself and not distracting other drivers, especially in complex conditions
- turning off the radio and other electronic devices that might make the distraction worse.

While passengers can be distracting they can also help you with some tasks, such as changing a CD.

If you have a P1 licence, you must not carry more than one passenger, aged between 16 and less than 22 years.

Regardless of your licence type, avoid carrying more than one passenger during your first year as a solo driver.

Managing risk

Other distractions

There are many other things inside and outside the car that can distract you while you are driving. These include:

- eating and drinking
- smoking
- brushing your hair
- reading maps
- fidgeting with the car controls
- feeling upset or angry about something that has happened
- advertising signs
- unusual events near the road
- pedestrians and other road users
- checking your makeup
- reaching for a bag or another object.

Distraction caused by any of these can take your attention from driving and might have serious consequences. Your risk of being involved in a crash is much higher when you are distracted and you take your eyes off the road.

You can reduce the risk by resisting any temptation to do something other than concentrating on your driving. This is especially important in the first months of solo driving as a P driver.

Fact

If a distraction is causing you to drive inappropriately, you can be fined under laws for careless or dangerous driving, or failing to have proper control of a motor vehicle. As a result, you may receive a heavy fine, loss of demerit points, or have your licence suspended or cancelled.

Fatigue

Driver fatigue is also a major cause of crashes. It can:

- cause you to fall asleep at the wheel
- slow your reflexes, and affect your attention and judgement.

Fatigue is often the result of having a busy lifestyle – parties, late-night jobs and studying. It can happen when:

- you are driving during hours you would normally be sleeping (10 pm - 6 am)
- you have not had enough sleep
- you have been awake too long (e.g. 17 hours)
- you drive as soon as you wake up
- you have been driving for more than 2 hours non-stop.

You might think that having coffee or taking a short break will stop fatigue. They don't – the only way to stop being fatigued is to get enough sleep.

Tip

A 15 minute power nap can reduce your chances of having a crash.

Stop driving if you notice any of the following:

- repeated yawning
- starting to drift across the lane
- eyes closing or your eyesight getting fuzzy
- trouble keeping your head up
- speed is increasing or decreasing unintentionally
- can't remember the last few kilometres of road
- day-dreaming.

To reduce the effect of fatigue:

- stop if you are tired and have a nap
- don't drive at times when you would normally be asleep such as between 10 pm and 6 am
- ensure any medicines you take don't cause drowsiness. (Ask your doctor or pharmacist.)

On a long trip:

- get plenty of sleep before the trip
- share the driving whenever possible
- plan ahead and rest overnight
- take regular breaks
- try to avoid driving during times you would normally be asleep
- don't start a trip after a long day's work.

Managing risk

Seatbelts

Wearing a seatbelt correctly increases the chance of surviving a crash.

Wearing a seatbelt is an important way of reducing risk not just for you as a driver, but for your passengers as well. Don't just think about yourself – make sure your passengers also buckle up, including rear seat passengers.

In a crash unrestrained drivers and passengers are often thrown out of cars or are tossed around inside the car, against the steering wheel, windscreen or other passengers. People who are thrown out of cars in crashes are up to 25 times more likely to be killed than those who remain within the vehicle.

Most crashes happen on short journeys. You must wear a seatbelt at all times even if it's only a trip around the corner. More information on seatbelts can be found on pages 77-79.

Fact

Drivers will be fined (including demerit points) if passengers are not wearing seatbelts and children under seven years are not using appropriate child restraints (see pages 77-78).

Passengers 16 years or older will also be fined for not wearing seatbelts.

Fact

It is both dangerous and illegal to carry unrestrained passengers in the boot, the back of utes or to drive with any part of a passenger's body outside the door or window of a vehicle. Fines and demerit points apply.

Vehicle safety

Analysis of crashes show that larger cars and cars with more safety features generally provide better real world occupant protection in a crash than smaller cars with less safety features.

The most important vehicle safety features you should try to get are airbags and Electronic Stability Control (ESC), which can only be fitted to the car at the time of manufacture.

Buying a safe vehicle will protect you and your passengers if you are involved in a crash. Whether you're planning to buy a new or used car, you can find out the safety rating of the cars you're interested in at TAC website howsafeisyourcar.com.au or the Australasian New Car Assessment program website ancap.com.au. Also look out for the 'Buyer's Guide to Used Car Safety Ratings' brochure.

Vehicle maintenance

- Tyre pressure and tread depth need to be checked and maintained at safe levels. Tyre problems are a common cause of defect related crashes.
- Vehicles should be regularly maintained by an expert.

Tip

If you have a tyre blowout while driving, remember to keep a firm grip on the steering wheel, take your foot off the accelerator and brake gently once you feel the vehicle is under some control.

Tip

Operation of Antilock Braking Systems (ABS)

In an emergency stop with ABS, keep firm pressure on the brake pedal. When ABS is operating there may be a vibration or shuddering through the car and the brake pedal may pulsate. For ABS to work properly keep firm pressure on the brake pedal.

To confirm if the car is fitted with ABS – check the owner's manual or ask the owner. Visit vicroads.vic.gov.au and search for ABS for more information.

Managing risk

Keys to reducing your risk of a crash

There are some simple strategies which will help you stay safe, especially in the first six months on your P plates.

Strategy 1 - Choose when and where to drive

As a new driver, you don't want to jump in the deep end, even with 120 hours experience as a learner. When possible, avoid driving in challenging situations such as:

- very late at night
- peak hour traffic in the city
- freeways
- rural roads
- wet weather
- fog
- snow and ice
- gravel and dirt roads.

You can reduce your risk of being in a crash by avoiding driving too much in situations where you don't have much driving experience. Build up your experience slowly in these situations.

Strategy 2 - Slow down

As you are still building your experience, you cannot anticipate potential hazards as well as drivers with more experience. Having a young person's reaction time is not enough.

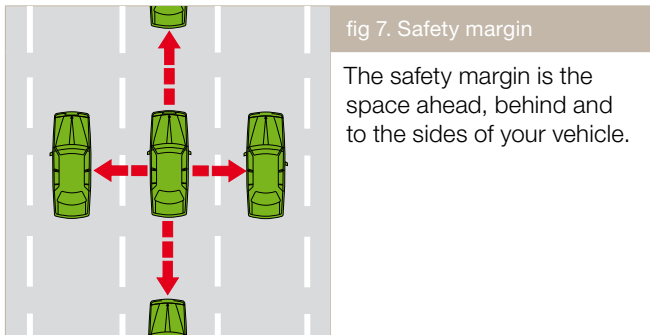
- Choose to drive at a safe speed under the speed limit.
- When you see any potential hazard, such as pedestrians or bicycle riders near the road, or turning vehicles in front of you, slow down a little and move your foot on or near the brake so you can stop if needed.
- Create a buffer to give you a bit more time to react to the unexpected.
- You won't notice going 2 or 3 km/h slower – it certainly isn't going to delay you in any way. So slow down a bit!
- The more you speed, the greater your risk of crashing and the more severe your injuries could be. In a 60 km/h zone your risk of crashing doubles for every 5 km/h you exceed the speed limit.
- The other thing to remember is that if you get caught speeding you will be fined and will lose demerit points. You may even lose your licence.

Strategy 3 - Give yourself some space

Having a bit more room to move gives you the space and time to overcome mistakes – including mistakes made by other drivers.

Give yourself enough time to react by leaving plenty of distance between your vehicle and the vehicles around you.

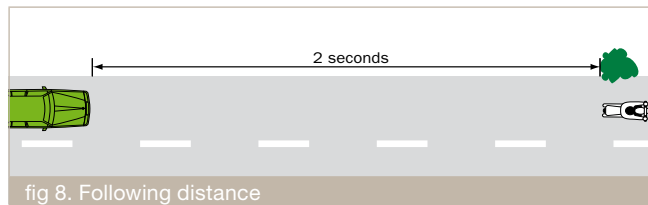
Leaving a safety margin can make the difference between stopping in time and crashing.



You must keep your vehicle a safe distance from any vehicle in front of you. A safe distance should be enough to allow time to slow down and avoid trouble.

Most drivers should be at least two seconds behind the vehicle in front. You can check this by a simple test:

- Focus on a marker in the distance such as a signpost or tree and note when the vehicle in front passes the marker.
- Count the number of seconds before your vehicle passes the same marker.
- If your count is not at least two seconds then you're too close.



Managing risk

Definition

The **following distance** is the space or gap between you and the vehicle in front.

A two second gap will allow for an average person's reaction time but leaving a larger gap – say three or four seconds – is a safer option for young drivers as they develop their hazard perception skills. Three or four second gaps are also a good safety margin:

- in distracting conditions
- when visibility is poor or when it is dark
- when the road is wet or slippery
- when you have a heavy load
- on a gravel road.

Heavy vehicles such as buses, trucks, trams and trains cannot manoeuvre like cars. They take longer to stop and longer to change direction, so they need larger safety margins to drive safely. Do not move into their safety margin.

If a vehicle behind is too close don't feel pressured to speed up.

If it is safe to do so, slow down slightly to increase the safety margin in front of your vehicle. This will give you more time to respond to a potential hazard so you don't have to brake suddenly.

Don't forget to make sure you have enough space all around you before you change lanes by using your mirrors and doing a head check.

Fact

If you are driving a long vehicle (any vehicle which, together with its trailer, is at least 7.5 metres long) and you are following another long vehicle, you must drive at least 60 metres away from it, except:

- in a built-up area (one with buildings next to the road or street lights), or
- on a multi-lane road.

You also need to keep back at least 200 metres when following another long vehicle in a road train area.

Strategy 4 - Think ahead

Don't focus all your attention on the vehicle in front. Keep your eyes moving and scan the traffic scene. Look well into the distance, to both sides and behind you by using your mirrors.

You don't naturally look around like this. You will need to practise and think about what others on the road might be intending to do. Your supervising driver will be able to help you. You can also use your time as a passenger to practise.

Plan your trips before you start out. Use a directory to check out the route you will travel.

Try using familiar routes wherever possible. This helps to reduce your workload and stress while driving.

Strategy 5 - Driving safely at night

Driving at night is more complicated than driving during the day because you cannot see as far ahead or as far around your car. It's much harder to anticipate potential hazards at night.

Even with 120 hours of driving experience you may not have had much experience at night. Once you get your licence, ease into driving and keep night driving to a minimum, particularly in the first few months of solo driving.

Keep your speed down at night so you will have time to identify and respond to potential hazards.

Tip

Make sure you get lots of practice driving at night when you are driving with your supervisor.

Fact

Crash risk is higher at night, with half of all probationary night-time crashes occurring on Friday and Saturday nights.

Managing risk

Strategy 6 - Driving safely on country roads

Country roads can present a variety of conditions: sealed, unsealed and gravel.

Get as much practice as you can under a variety of weather and light conditions on all forms of country roads when you are a learner.

Strategy 7 - Dealing with other road users

As a driver you share the road with many other people:

- other drivers of cars, vans, trucks, buses and trams
- pedestrians
- motorcyclists
- cyclists.

Sharing the road with all these road users is easier and safer if you drive cooperatively. This means:

- using your indicators to allow plenty of warning when you are turning or changing lanes
- allowing plenty of space between your car and the one in front of you
- controlling your speed in a smooth manner rather than a fast stop/start manner
- staying in the left lane except when you are passing
- keeping intersections clear
- letting others merge into the traffic
- changing lanes correctly
- slowing down when approaching and passing through roadworks.

There are times when the need for cooperative driving is essential. This includes places where:

- two lanes merge
- the left lane ends
- extra lanes exist just before and after intersections
- overtaking lanes or divided roads end
- cars are parked and there is not enough room for two vehicles to pass
- drivers need to exit from a small side street
- drivers are parking.

Driving a car in today's traffic can be frustrating and stressful at times. If you lose your temper, it affects your judgement and reduces your ability to drive safely.

You can keep your cool by:

- planning your trip, allowing plenty of time to get to your destination and knowing how to get there
- if you're running late, calling ahead before you get behind the wheel
- where possible, avoiding driving if angry, tired or emotionally stressed.

Sometimes you might make a mistake – it might be as simple as not indicating early enough or moving into what another driver considers to be their personal space. This might upset another driver and lead to them losing their cool. They might tailgate, flash their headlights, use the horn or make obscene gestures.

You can help others keep their cool on the road. Here's what you can do.

- Always drive cooperatively, even when others are not.
- Give other drivers plenty of space so they don't feel like you are invading their personal space.
- Concentrate on driving and pay attention to changes in driving conditions (speed, roadworks etc.).
- If you make a mistake while driving, acknowledge it.
- If another driver makes a mistake or becomes aggressive, try not to react – remember it is a mistake, not a personal attack.
- Only flash your headlights or use the horn to warn other drivers about a situation that could be dangerous.
- Don't make offensive hand gestures.

Managing risk

If you come into contact with an aggressive driver, don't take it personally.

- Drive normally and try not to react.
- Avoid eye contact.
- Give the other driver plenty of space: if the other driver is in front, increase the gap between you, and if the other car is tailgating you, maintain a steady speed or provide an opportunity to let them pass.
- If hassled or confronted, keep your doors and windows locked and do not get out of your car.
- If you are very concerned, drive to the nearest police station.



Driving and the environment

Using a car affects the environment. You can reduce your impact on the environment by using 'Eco-driving' techniques. Eco-driving is smart driving as it helps you save money, protects the environment, and keeps you and your passengers safe.

You can start using eco-driving techniques when you are in stage 4 of learning to drive, or once you've got your licence and feel more confident.

Drive smoothly.

- Avoid hard or unnecessary acceleration and severe braking.
- Decelerate smoothly by releasing the accelerator and leaving the car in gear as you slow down.
- Don't take off too fast – otherwise you could use 60% more fuel.

Slow down and maintain a steady speed.

- Slowing down and maintaining a steady speed will use less fuel (at 110 km/h a car uses up to 25% more fuel than cruising at 90 km/h).
- Use cruise control whenever safe.

Read the traffic flow.

- Stay back from the car in front to allow travel with the flow of traffic.
- Tailgating causes unnecessary acceleration and deceleration and increases fuel use.
- Allowing plenty of space gives you more time to see and anticipate traffic situations, and minimise fuel use.

Plan your journeys.

- Try to avoid peak-hour.
- Try not to use your car if you don't need to – use public transport, carpool, walk or cycle instead.
- Take fewer car trips by planning to do a number of things at once.
- Reduce travel distances by going to nearby shops, and walking or cycling to your local shops.

Maintain your vehicle.

- Keep your car's tyres inflated to the highest pressure recommended in the owner's manual. If your tyre pressure is too low, you'll increase your fuel consumption.
- Regularly service your vehicle to save yourself money and minimise your impact on the environment.