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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 the risk.

The best way for new solo drivers to manage the risk is to be prepared. The more driving experiences you have with a supervising driver, the better prepared you will be later as a solo driver.

You also reduce the risk by making good decisions and taking responsibility for your behaviour when driving.

Certain factors have been shown to increase the risk on the road:

- alcohol and/or drugs and driving
- speeding
- fatigue – driving when tired
- not wearing seat belts
- poor vehicle maintenance.

These are risk factors you can't ignore. You need to be responsible for your actions and make the right decision to manage these risks. It's really up to you to *drive within your limits*.



The best way for new solo drivers to manage the risk is to be really prepared



*Zero
always
means
zero*

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

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

The mix of any of these together is even worse than any one of them by itself. A driver who has had just 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.

As a learner or probationary driver you must stick to zero Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) – no alcohol at all. There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule.

There are severe penalties for learner and probationary drivers who commit a drink drive offence. This includes fitting of an alcohol ignition interlock for drink driving offenders caught with a BAC of 0.07 or more when they get their licence back.

It is important to remember that alcohol can remain in your system 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 page 68.

Different drugs will affect you in different ways, but they all have a bad effect on your driving.

Many prescription and over-the-counter medicines can affect your ability to drive safely. Find out what effects the medicines you take may have on you. Don't just rely on what your friends say – talk to your doctor or pharmacist to find out more.

Don't mix driving with alcohol or drugs (including 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.

MOBILE PHONES

For all learners and P1 probationary licence holders (under 21 years when they get their licence) no mobile phone use is permitted, hands free or hand held, or messaging of any kind.

P2 probationary drivers (21 years or over when they get their licence) and fully licensed drivers of a vehicle (except an emergency vehicle or police

vehicle) must not use a hand-held phone while the vehicle is moving, or is stationary but not parked.

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 all fatal crashes and about 30% of crashes involving only one vehicle – such as running off the road. It also increases how serious a crash will be.

For new solo drivers speeding is even more risky. Going faster than other traffic reduces your margin for error. As a new solo driver it is difficult to do all the things you have to do:

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

Speeding just makes these harder.

More information on speed can be found on pages 46 and 76.

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 judgment.

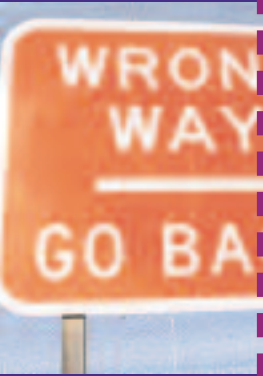
For young drivers, fatigue is often the result of having a busy lifestyle – parties, late-night jobs and studying. It can happen when:

- you have not had enough sleep
- you have been driving for too long without a break
- you drive at times when you are usually asleep.

Be aware of how your lifestyle affects you – try to avoid driving when you are tired.

You might think that having coffee or taking a short break will stop fatigue. Unfortunately this will not help for long – the only way to stop being fatigued is to get enough sleep.





Stop and have a sleep if you notice any of the following:

- constant 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.



Even a power nap of 15 minutes sleep can reduce your chances of having a crash.

To reduce the chance of fatigue:

- stop if you are tired and have a sleep
- don't drive at times when you would normally be asleep such as between 1am and 6am
- ensure any medicines you take don't cause drowsiness.

• On a long trip:

- get plenty of sleep before the trip
- share the driving whenever possible
- plan ahead and rest overnight
- take regular breaks
- don't start a trip after a long day's work.



Fatigue can be a side effect of using a range of substances – including alcohol. Fatigue slows you down in all sorts of ways – even very experienced drivers can't drive if they are asleep!

SEAT BELTS

Wearing a seat belt increases the chance of surviving a crash – provided it is worn correctly.

Wearing a seat belt is an important way of managing 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!

Did you know that most crashes happen on short journeys? So wear a seat belt at all times even if it's only a trip around the corner. More information on seat belts can be found on page 74.



Drivers will be fined if passengers under 16 years are not wearing seat belts or child restraints. Passengers 16 years or older will be fined for not wearing seat belts.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

- Tyre pressure and tread depth need to be checked and maintained at safe levels. Tyre problems are the most common cause of defect related crashes.
- Vehicles must be regularly maintained by an expert.
- Prospective vehicle purchasers should check the safety rating of any vehicle they are considering to purchase. New and used car safety ratings can be checked via www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au. You can also refer to the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) website www.ancap.com.au or brochure, and the 'Buyer's Guide to Used Car Safety Ratings' brochure.

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Being in control of your driving can also mean deciding not to drive

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*Just after
you get your
licence...
the most
dangerous
time of all!*

MANAGING DRIVING RISK

Practice prepares you to meet the demands of driving. Your ability to drive will improve with practice. The more you do, the better you get.

However, managing the risks of driving is also about choices:

- you can choose to drive more slowly
- you can choose to increase the space between you and the car in front
- you can choose to stay behind rather than try and overtake – especially if you’re turning off in a few kilometres
- you can choose to ease off a bit more when entering a corner.

You choose; you decide.

When you are licensed to drive solo – without a supervising driver – you can also choose when to drive and when not to drive. Remember there is still a lot to learn.

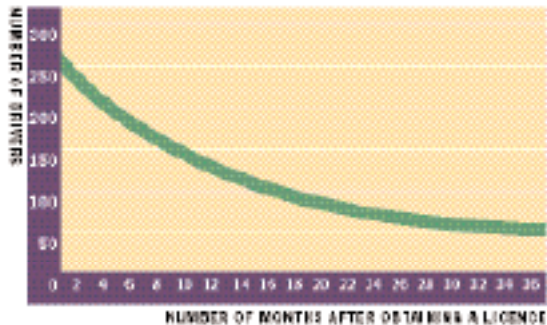
You still need to build on your supervised driving experience after you have passed your probationary licence test. But do this gradually as you get used to the additional challenges of solo driving.



Give yourself a chance to ease into driving solo – perhaps you may not have a lot of night-time driving experience, so ease into it as a solo driver and let your experience build up gradually.

YOUR CRASH RISK AS A SOLO DRIVER

The following graph shows the likelihood of being involved in a crash resulting in death or serious injury. The likelihood of a crash is almost halved after 6 to 8 months of solo driving experience. It also shows that you will continue to improve for years after getting your licence.



DRIVERS INVOLVED IN CASUALTY CRASHES AFTER LICENSING

There are many reasons why the graph looks like this including:

- poor preparation for solo driving
- limited practice as a learner
- taking unnecessary risks – being distracted, speeding, mixing alcohol or other drugs with driving.

The fact is that there are real and great dangers facing you as a new solo driver. The challenge for you will be just as great as it is for other new solo drivers. The choices you make during this time are very important.





*The more
space around
your car, the
greater the
time you have
to take action
to avoid
hazards*

REDUCING YOUR RISK OF A CRASH

There are four simple strategies, which will help you through:

Strategy 1

Slow down just a bit

Because you are still building your experience, you cannot expect to be able to anticipate as well as drivers with more experience.

You may be young and have great reflexes, but this is not enough to avoid a crash. You need to be able to think ahead and respond in the right way. Relying on your reactions alone is a risky business.

It makes good sense to build in a bit of a buffer – to take the pressure off and give you just that little bit more time. So, slow down a bit!

It means dropping your average speed by a few kilometres per hour. You won't notice going 2 or 3 km/h slower – it certainly isn't going to delay you in any way – but it will give you more time to react to the unexpected.

Strategy 2

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.

It is similar to slowing down a bit – a slightly larger margin for error can make the difference between stopping in time and crashing.

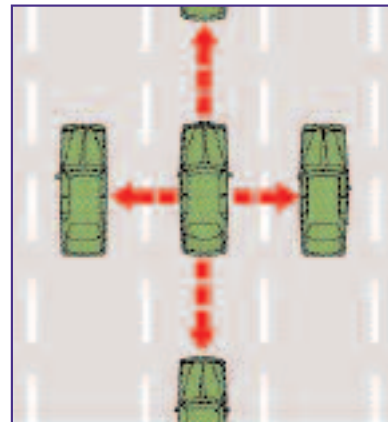


FIGURE 4

Safety margin

The safety margin is the space ahead, behind and to the sides of your vehicle.



FIGURE 5

Following distance

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

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.

You 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, then count the number of seconds before your vehicle passes the

same marker. Ask your supervising driver to also do this and compare your results.

If your count is not at least two seconds then you're too close.

At least two seconds of time and the distance this represents under ideal driving conditions are necessary to give you time to react to any changes which may happen.

Often, you may need more than two seconds. This includes:

- when visibility is poor
- if conditions are dark





- if conditions are wet or slippery
- when you have a heavy load
- when the road is unmade.

You need to develop your judgement skills about what distance at different speeds represents two seconds. This skill will only come with lots of supervised driving experience.

But remember, under any conditions that are less than ideal, a longer gap is recommended.



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
- in a 'Keep Left Unless Overtaking' zone.

Strategy 3 Think ahead

Don't get caught up just looking at the vehicle in front. Keep your eyes moving and scan the traffic scene. Look well into the distance, to both sides and in your mirrors.

You don't naturally look around like this. You will need to practise and think about what all the 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 so you know the way to go. Try using more familiar routes wherever possible.

This helps to reduce your workload and stress while driving.

Strategy 4

Driving safely at night

Once you get your licence, ease into it and keep night driving to a minimum, particularly in the first few months of solo driving. Not carrying more than one passenger during the first year or so as a solo driver, especially at night, can also be a good safety strategy.



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

Keep your speed down, and you will have time to react. You should be able to stop within the distance you can see. In the country this will be your headlight range.

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

Points to remember:

- 1 *Prepare for the challenge*
- 2 *Practise often*
- 3 *Drive within your limits and manage the risk*



