

# 5. Be in Shape to Drive

Driving safely is not always easy. In fact, it is one of the most complex things that people do. It also is one of the few things we do regularly that can injure and kill us. It is worth the effort to be a careful driver.

To be a safe driver takes a lot of skill and judgment. This task is even more difficult when you are just learning to drive. Driving can easily take all the ability you have. Your ability to be a safe driver depends on being able to see clearly, not being overly tired, not driving while on drugs, being generally healthy, and being emotionally fit to drive. In other words, being in “shape” to drive safely.

## Alcohol and Drugs

The use of alcohol while driving is one of the leading causes of accidents, especially fatal accidents. Twenty eight percent of all fatal Iowa accidents are related to alcohol use. More than 70 percent of these alcohol-related deaths are people between the ages of 16 and 34!

No one can drink alcohol and drive safely, even if you have many years of driving experience. New drivers are more affected by alcohol than experienced drivers because new drivers are still learning to drive.

Because drinking alcohol and then driving is so dangerous, the penalties are very tough. People who drive after drinking risk getting heavy fines, higher insurance rates, loss of their driver's licenses, and even jail sentences.

## Why is Drinking and Driving So Dangerous?

Alcohol reduces all of the important skills you need to drive safely. After you drink alcohol, it goes from your stomach into your blood and to all parts of your body. It reaches your brain in 20 to 40 minutes. In your brain, alcohol affects those areas of your brain that control judgment and skill. This is one reason why drinking alcohol is so dangerous; it affects your judgment. Good judgment is important to driving. You may think you are driving better or are more capable when the exact opposite is true.

Alcohol slows your reflexes and reaction time, reduces your ability to see clearly, and makes you less alert. As the amount of alcohol in your body increases, your judgment worsens and your skill decreases. You will have trouble judging distances, speeds and the movement of other vehicles.

It reduces your coordination and relaxes your eye muscles, causing your vision to lose its sharpness. Your **night vision is cut in half and your side vision is reduced by one-third**. Your speech and reflexes become worse with each drink.

Alcohol takes effect quickly but it is slow to let go. Only time will get it out of your system. Cold showers, black coffee and exercise will do nothing to sober you up. Once in the body, alcohol must be chemically broken down and oxidized by the liver. This is a slow process.

There are ways of dealing with social drinking situations. Arrange to go with two or more persons, where one of you will not drink alcohol. You can rotate among the group being a “designated driver.” If available, you might use public transportation, or use a cab.

The penalties for drinking and driving are severe. See page 46.

## Other Drugs and Driving

Drugs can be legal or illegal. They may be taken in any amount under any circumstances. Many people are multiple drug users. That means they use more than one drug.

Drugs are very complicated and so is your body. The same drug may have a different effect on you, depending on what you have been doing or how you are feeling. When you combine drugs, it is very difficult to be sure what will happen. This includes mixing alcohol and prescription medications given to you by your doctor.

One way to group different kinds of drugs is the way you can get them: over-the-counter, prescription, and illegal. Reduce the chance of serious side effects from prescription and over-the-counter drugs by closely following package instructions. Many over-the-counter and prescription medications warn you not to drive or operate heavy equipment while taking the drug.

Illegal drugs are usually bought “on the street,” and their content and side effects are unknown. Their strength and purity may vary a great deal. They are very dangerous. For your own safety and the safety of others on the road, do not use street drugs.

All drugs produce two side effects. They produce the effects desired, such as fighting illness or disease. They also can produce side effects that can range from simply unpleasant to fatal.

Most drugs act on the central nervous system. Stimulants speed the body up, depressants slow it down, and hallucinogens affect the way the drug user views the world.

Here is a quick look at some of the more common drugs and their effects:

**Amphetamines** speed up your body. Tired people, including drivers, incorrectly use these drugs to keep going when they are worn down. That is why they are known as “pep pills” or “uppers.” They give users a false sense of alertness and self-confidence which may make a driver take chances he/she would not take when not under the influence of drugs.

Some common amphetamines include cocaine, speed, etc.

**Barbiturates** are used to slow the body down. They are one of the most abused groups of prescription drugs around. They reduce alertness and energy. They are often prescribed by medical doctors to counteract nervousness or other emotional symptoms. They affect alertness, reaction time, sight and coordination.

Depression often follows when the effects wear off. Tranquilizers are probably the most used barbiturates.

**Hallucinogens** affect the way the user sees the world. Marijuana, LSD and PCP are some of the most common hallucinogenic drugs, but they are by no means the only ones. These drugs affect the way users view their surroundings. The drugs affect mood, reaction time and the ability to judge time.

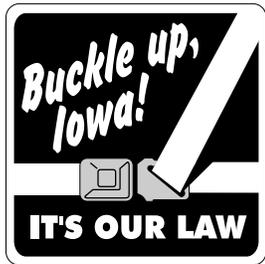


Drug use in the U.S. is common. One of every four Americans uses some type of drug each day. Most of these are over-the-counter drugs. Most are used according to the direction and at the proper dosage so they cause no problems. Using drugs for the proper purpose at the recommended dosage and avoiding illegal drugs is the best way to avoid excessive drug use. Be sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist when using a new drug. Your doctor or pharmacist can tell you if it will affect your driving ability or how the drug may be affected by drugs you are already taking. If you plan to use alcohol, check to see how the drug reacts with alcohol.

## Persons With Disabilities Parking Identification Permits

If you are disabled, you may qualify for a disability parking identification permit. A statement is required from your physician, chiropractor, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner on his or her letterhead stationery verifying you are disabled and whether the condition is temporary or permanent. Your condition must meet the criteria in the definition of a disabled person. There is no charge for the device. Organizations and persons in the business of transporting the disabled may obtain a persons with disabilities parking device. Contact your local driver's license station, county treasurer, or the Iowa Department of Transportation, Office of Vehicle Services, P.O. Box 9278, Des Moines, IA 50306-9278, for further information, or to apply for a disability parking device. Applications are available on line at [www.iowadot.gov/mvd/ovs/disabled.htm](http://www.iowadot.gov/mvd/ovs/disabled.htm)

## Seat Belts and Child Restraints Seat Belts



All passenger cars and pickup trucks manufactured since 1966 are required to have seat belts. They offer the best chance of survival and reduced injuries if you are in an accident. If you ride in the front seat, your chances of being seriously injured or killed in an accident are reduced at least 50 percent if you are wearing a seat belt.

Iowa law requires ALL drivers and other persons riding in the front seats of automobiles, trucks, motor homes or buses to wear seat belts or harnesses unless:

- The person is a child under 6 years old and is properly restrained in an approved child seat or belt. For optimum safety, it is recommended that children under age 12 not ride in the front seat whenever possible. Children required to use a front- or rear-facing safety seat should never be placed in the front passenger seat of a vehicle equipped with an active passenger-side air bag. See the section concerning the child restraint law on page 52.
- The vehicle is not required to have seat belts or harnesses.
- The driver or passenger must get in and out of the vehicle often to do his or her job, and the vehicle is not driven faster than 25 mph.

- The driver is a rural mail carrier delivering the mail between the first and last stops on the route.
- The passenger is riding on a bus.
- The driver or passenger is unable to wear a seat belt or safety harness for medical reasons. A person seeking an exemption from wearing seat belts or harnesses must have the need for that exemption certified by a physician on a form available from the Iowa DOT. The certification is valid for the maximum of 12 months, but can be renewed at the end of each 12-month period if necessary.
- The front seat passengers in a vehicle owned, leased, rented or primarily used by a physically disabled person who uses a collapsible wheelchair.
- The passenger is being transported by an authorized emergency vehicle in an emergency situation.

Wear your lap belt snugly across your hips. If you are pregnant, you can safely wear the belt across the pelvis, as low under your abdomen as possible.

In addition to protecting you from injury, as a driver, seat belts help you keep control of the vehicle. If you are struck from the side or make a quick turn, the force could push you sideways. You cannot steer the vehicle if you are not behind the wheel.

Seat belts should be worn even if the vehicle is equipped with air bags. While air bags are good protection against hitting the steering wheel, dashboard or windshield, they do not protect you if you are hit from the side or rear, or if the car rolls over. Also, an air bag will not keep you behind the wheel in these situations.

Some people still have incorrect information about using seat belts. For example:

***“Seat belts can trap you inside a car.”***

It takes less than a second to undo a seat belt. This information tells of a car that caught fire or sank in deep water. Accidents like this seldom happen. Even if they do, a seat belt may keep you from being “knocked out.” Your chance to escape will be better if you are conscious.

***“Seat belts are good on long trips, but I do not need them if I am driving around town.”***

Over half of all traffic deaths happen within 25 miles of home. Many of them occur on roads with speed limits of less than 45 mph.

***“Some people are thrown clear in an accident and walk away with hardly a scratch.”***

Your chances of not being killed in an accident are much better if you stay inside the car. Seat belts can keep you from being thrown out of your vehicle into the path of another one.

***“If I get hit from the side, I am better off being thrown across the car; away from the crash point.”***

When a car is struck from the side, it will move sideways. Everything in the car that is not fastened down, including the passengers, will slide toward the point of crash, not away from it.

***“At slow speed, I can brace myself.”***

Even at 25 mph, the force of a head-on crash is the same as pedaling a bicycle full speed into a brick wall or diving off a three-story building onto the sidewalk. No one can “brace” for that.

## Child Restraint Law - Infancy to Age 18



1. **Applies to all seating positions in the vehicle.**
2. **A child under one year of age and weighing less than 20 pounds must be secured in a rear-facing child restraint system.**
3. **A child under six years of age who does not meet the description in #1 must be secured by a child restraint system.**
4. **A child at least six years of age but under eighteen years of age shall be secured by a child restraint system or a safety belt or safety harness.**

**All child restraint systems must be used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.**

Safety seats must meet federal motor vehicle safety standards and must be used properly.

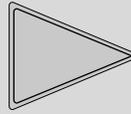
There is a fine for violation of this law. The fine for the first violation can be waived by the court if you prove you have obtained a safety seat.

### Supplemental Restraint Systems (Air Bags)

Air bags help save drivers and front seat passengers from death or serious injury in motor vehicle accidents. Please remember that wearing your seat belt is part of the supplemental restraint system. Your air bag is a supplemental system; alone it may not prevent serious injuries. Air bags may not inflate in side or rear-end crashes.

## Self-help Review

1. A pennant-shaped sign is used to indicate what? On what side of the road will a pennant-shaped sign be placed?



**Information found in "Traffic Signs and Rules of the Road" in Section 2.**

2. You come to an intersection that has no stop signs or traffic signals. At the same time, another vehicle has arrived at the intersection and this vehicle is on your right. Who has the right-of-way?

**Information found in "When to Yield the Right-of-Way" in Section 2.**

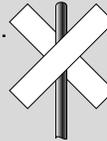
3. What must you do if you come up behind a school bus and the school bus has its amber lights near the top of the bus flashing?

**Information found in "School Buses" in Section 2.**

4. How close can you park to a fire hydrant?

**Information found in "Parking is Not Allowed" in Section 2.**

5. Do you know what a "crossbuck sign" is and where you might come across one?



**Information found in "Railroad Crossings" in Section 2.**

6. Do you know how pavement markings help you determine which way traffic flows on a particular street?

**Information found in "Pavement Markings and Other Lane Controls" in Section 2.**

7. If you are driving in bad weather conditions such as rain, ice, snow or fog, what is the first safe thing you should think about doing? Do you know what "hydroplaning" means?

**Information found in "Bad Weather Driving" in Section 3.**

8. What is the speed limit in a business district?

**Information found in "Appropriate Speed" in Section 3.**

9. Do you know what "blind spots" are and where they are?

**Information found in "Changing Lanes," "Blind Spots," and "Sharing the Road" all found in Section 3.**

10. Do you know what "Implied Consent" means?

**Information found in "OWI-Operating While Intoxicated or Drugged" in Section 4.**