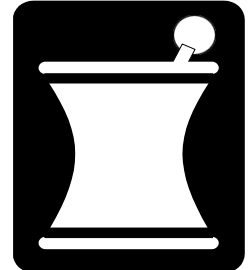


Psychiatric Medicines and Driving

Patient Information – Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Driving and medicines

Most people know that alcohol and driving is a bad mix. But not as many would think that taking some prescription medicines and driving could be just as dangerous. Some psychiatric medicines can affect your alertness and concentration. This can affect how you drive. You may notice this more at the start of treatment or after increasing the dose. If your medicine has a big effect on you, it is important to stop driving during this time. You should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if any of your medicines are likely to interfere with your ability to drive safely.



What are the issues?

A number of medicines including some antipsychotics, some antidepressants, benzodiazepines and zopiclone can interfere with your ability to drive. They can impair your concentration, make you unable to focus or pay attention, slow down your reaction time, make you sleepy, drowsy, dizzy or faint, make your vision blurry or rarely make you overexcited. Do not drive if you have any of these symptoms.

Using alcohol, other prescribed medicines (including opioids) or recreational drugs (e.g. cannabis) with a psychiatric medicine (e.g. a benzodiazepine) can seriously impair your concentration and make it dangerous to drive.

How long should I avoid driving for?

It is important not to drive until you know how the medicine affects you. Some medicines only have short-term effects when you change the dose. This means you might only need to stop driving for a few days until your body adjusts. However, some medicines are strong enough that you will need to stop driving for the whole course. Learn to know how your body reacts to the medicine and supplements you are taking. Keep track of how you feel, and when the effects occur.

Not taking medicine also has consequences

Not taking some medicines while driving can also be risky, for example:

- Some people with epilepsy may not be able to drive at all without taking their medicine.
- If you were to stop taking your psychiatric medicine, your original symptoms may return.

What does the law say about driving?

You are required by law to be mentally and physically fit to drive on public roads in New Zealand. It is an offence to drive while impaired after taking a medicine such as a benzodiazepine or zopiclone.

The aim of this law is to make New Zealand roads safer. Where a police officer has “good cause to suspect” that a driver has consumed a medicine (e.g. a benzodiazepine), the officer may require the driver to take a compulsory impairment test.

Reasons for having good cause to suspect include erratic driving or, if the driver has been stopped for another reason, appearing to be under the influence of drugs. An example of this is a person stopped at an alcohol checkpoint who is behaving in an intoxicated manner but passes a breath alcohol test.

If the driver does not satisfactorily complete the compulsory impairment test, the police officer may forbid the driver to drive, and require the driver to provide a blood sample.

Tips for taking medicines and driving

- Ask your doctor, nurse, case manager or pharmacist if the medicine you are prescribed may affect driving and if it is safe to drive. Read your medicine labels to see if it may affect your driving.
- If you feel that the medicine you are taking is affecting your driving, talk to your doctor.
- They may be able to change your dose, what time you take the medicine, or switch you to a medicine that doesn't make you so drowsy.
- Consider other options to driving such as rides with family and friends, taxi, public buses, trains, or walking.

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some of the effects of medicines. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well but be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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