

Health & Fitness

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Many common medications greatly impair one's driving

~~Special to the News~~

Dear Dr. Meinig:

When I take the tranquilizers my doctor prescribed for me, I don't drive my car because I am worried my ability to make normal decisions in fast moving traffic might be impaired.

However, numbers of people that I talk to who are on tranquilizers feel no concern about driving.

Nobody seems to write anything about this problem.

Would you do so as I think this is a bigger problem than the public imagines?

— C.U.

Dear C.U.:

You have hit upon a very serious and perplexing predicament.

In many ways the effects of prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs have on driving ability are often a greater hazard to the driver and the public than is the use of alcohol.

The judgment and decision making of those who operate high- or even low-speed vehicles can be greatly impaired by quite a number of common medications.

Symptoms that may take place are slowing of reaction time, drowsiness, vision alteration, nausea, stomach and intestinal pain, dizziness, muscle twitching, fatigue, eye irritation and central nervous system depression.

It should be obvious that each of these can lead to faulty driving judgments.

Because so many feel that if a little does good more will be better, it is not unusual for people to overdose.

Still another problem that takes place is due to the detrimental interaction that can occur when

George Meinig, DDS



two or more different medications are taken close together.

The public is beginning to be aware of the fact that you don't have to be drunk from alcohol to impair driving ability and cause accidents.

However, it has taken the threats of loss of one's drivers license or a jail term for the problem to sink in.

When accidents occur and alcohol isn't involved, it is rare for police officers to question those involved about their use of prescription or over-the-counter medications.

It certainly seems evident that questions should at least be made about the use of sedatives, tranquilizers, and narcotic pain killers.

Other drugs that can affect driving ability are:

- Antidepressants.
- Antihistamines.
- Pain killers.
- Some high blood pressure medications.
- Anticholinergics used to treat irritable bowel syndrome, motion sickness, and other medical conditions.

In addition, numerous other medications can cause drivers to be inattentive.

People who are taking medications should always ask their doctor or pharmacist if the prescription will impair their driving ability.

In addition, the warning labels should be read and their advice adhered to.

An article on the subject appeared in the publication *American Pharmacy* in May of 1989.

In it, Joseph Link, an attorney and professor of pharmacy at the University of Kentucky, stated that the courts are now beginning to more broadly interpret the phrase, "driving under the influence" and the laws to which that statement pertains.

One court said that it didn't matter whether it was stewed prunes, alcohol, or any other substance, if it "impairs your ability to drive, then you have an obligation to cease driving."

Link mentioned in the article that several people have recently been convicted of driving while impaired due to the influence of prescription medication.

People vary widely in their sensitivity to drugs. If one reacts unfavorably to any medications or foods that impair decision making, they must refrain from driving to protect themselves and society.