

Impaired driving: It's not just about booze anymore

By Andrea Bassett

Impaired driving used to be known as, simply, drunk driving. Booze, slurring, weaving, and driving home a pal who had 'one too many' were the simple clues we needed to identify when to stay out of the driver's seat. Things aren't so cut and dried anymore. Impaired driving happens for many reasons: alcohol, recreational drugs, prescription and over-the-counter medication, texting, and lack of sleep.

For many of us, driving is an essential and daily activity that we end up sharing with friends, loved ones, and complete strangers. That makes driving both a personal and a communal activity and because of this, the overarching principle of not being a danger to yourself and others speaks to many of us. We all know drunk driving is a crime (not to mention a social faux-pas and the ultimate display of bad manners), but it's time for us to evolve our definition of impaired driving to include other activities that undermine our contributions to road safety.

Impaired driving can happen when:

- You're drinking – this is the situation we think of first.
- You're high on recreational or 'weekend' drugs.
- You're taking your prescription medicine as prescribed.
- You're taking over the counter medication.
- You're texting or talking, and the phone fell and you're just going to grab it quickly...
- You did not get enough sleep and you're drowsy.
- You're in road-rage mode and not thinking rationally.

Consider if any of these situations have applied to you. In some instances, you may have been completely oblivious to the fact that you were, in fact, driving impaired. You can keep yourself, your family, and the roads safe by taking some simple precautions to avoid getting on the road while you're in a state of disrepair.

Avoid impaired driving with these easy tips:

- Choose to be or have a designated driver – avoid drinking and/or recreational drugs altogether when you'll be driving later. According to the RCMP, 'impaired driving is driving while you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.' One and you're done!
- Stick to the one drink per hour rule and know when you've had enough.
- Talk to your pharmacist – your prescriptions or over-the-counter medication may be causing drowsiness or other side-effects that can impair your motor skills. Your pharmacist can tell you more about this and about any side-effects of taking multiple pharmaceuticals at the same time.

- Cage your phone – put it in the glovebox to avoid temptation or, if you must talk, use a hands-free device.
- Don't be a hero – if you're tired, stay where you are, ask someone else to drive, or pull over and have a catnap. Falling asleep at the wheel is not a memory you want.
- Simmer down – if road rage has become part of your experience, it's time to cool it. Take up some stress relieving activities like exercise or meditation and remind yourself that being right is not more valuable than being safe. For some tips, have a look at this [article on managing road rage](#).

Updating our definition of impaired driving is an easy way to make roads safer for ourselves, our friends and loved ones, and the total strangers who make up our community. And that will help us all sleep better at night!

If you could use some additional help coping with a tendency to drive impaired, handling your road rage, or are worried about a family member, please contact your EFAP to talk about how a counsellor can support you and your goals.

This article was originally published on Morneau Shepell's WorkHealthLife site:
www.workhealthlife.com/