7 personal strategies

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In the previous chapter, you learned how to share the road safely with other road users. This chapter gives strategies you can use to handle situations that can have a negative influence on you and your driving.

Fitness to drive

You in the driver's seat

You wake up with a cold and feel awful, but you have to go to work. You take some cold medication before getting into your car. As you're driving, you notice that you feel light-headed and tired. Turning right at the first intersection, you narrowly miss a cyclist.

What should you do?

To be in control while driving, you need to be able to rely on the information your eyes and ears pick up. You need to be healthy, rested and focused to be a safe driver.

Seeing and hearing

Experts estimate that about 80 per cent of all driving information comes to drivers through their eyes. You need to take a vision screening test before you can be licensed to drive.

Your sense of hearing also helps you gather information about the driving scene. Listen for important warning signals such as horns, sirens, train whistles and unusual noises in your engine.

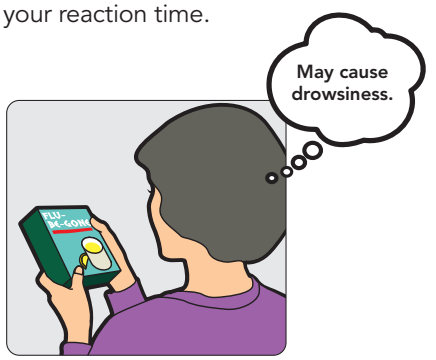
Strategies: seeing and hearing effectively

To see and hear effectively while driving:

- Use glasses or contact lenses if you need them.
- Scan systematically as you drive.
- Repair or replace a noisy engine muffler.
- Don't play your stereo too loudly.
- Don't use a cellphone or headphones while driving.

Assessing your health

Even a mild illness like a cold or the flu can affect your alertness. Over-the-counter medicines can make you drowsy and slow your reaction time.



If you have a health condition that you think might impair your ability to drive, be sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist before getting behind the wheel.

Read labels carefully before taking medication if you plan to drive.

Strategies: what to do if you're not feeling well

- Take the bus or get a friend to drive you.
- Read the label carefully if you are taking any medications. Don't drive if the label says the drug may cause drowsiness or dizziness.

Staying awake

Being tired is one of the leading causes of crashes. Fatigue affects all stages of the see-think-do strategy. It can cause you to scan inaccurately, slow your thinking and lengthen your reaction time.

driving tip

You can become unaware of your surroundings when you drive for a long time on a highway or freeway that doesn't change much. This is called highway hypnosis. Some areas have installed rumble strips or rough patches to warn drivers if they start to drift into another lane. You can help avoid highway hypnosis by turning off the cruise control, scanning systematically and using strategies to stay awake.

Strategies: staying awake

To keep alert behind the wheel, especially for long journeys:

- Start out well rested.
- Take breaks. Walk around and get some exercise.
- Stop and eat, but avoid heavy meals because they may make you feel sleepy.
- Keep the heat level moderate.
- Keep a window open for fresh air.
- Sing or talk to keep yourself paying attention.
- Pull over to a rest stop and take a nap (be sure to lock your doors).
- Don't drive too far at one time. If you are making a long trip, be especially careful on the second day. This is when tiredness is most likely to affect you.

Keeping focused

When you are driving, your mind and senses should be focused only on driving. Distractions can affect your hazard perception and your reaction time.

Strategies: Leave your phone alone

To help you concentrate on driving:

- Leave your phone alone while driving, turn it off and put it somewhere it won't distract you.
- No call or text is so important it's worth risking your life. Let calls go to voicemail and ignore your text messages while driving.
- Pull over and stop your car if you need to use your cellphone or other electronic device.
- Pull over and look after whatever is distracting you — check the map and figure out the best route, look for the music you want to play, send a text message, etc.
- Assign a designated texter. Ask your passengers to make or receive calls and texts for you.
- Make a 'text stop' at highway rest areas, some of which now provide free Wi-Fi.

crash fact

Studies show that drivers who are talking on a cell phone lose about 50 per cent of what is going on around them, visually. When you are stopped at an intersection or slowed in traffic, you are still driving.

Source: IIHS (Insurance Institute of Highway Safety).

Cellphones and other devices

All B.C. drivers, including those in GLP, are prohibited by law from using hand-held electronic devices while driving. You may not:

- operate, view or hold hand-held cellphones or other electronic communication devices,
- send or read emails or texts,
- operate or hold hand-held music or portable gaming devices, and
- manually program or adjust GPS systems while driving. The law applies whenever you are in control of the vehicle — even when you are stopped at a red light or in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

GLP drivers are also restricted from operating hands-free electronic devices while driving except calling 9-1-1 to report an emergency. The greater restrictions help GLP drivers stay focused on the road while building driving experience. This means **no use of personal electronic devices at any-time, including hands-free phones except calling 9-1-1 to report an emergency.** GLP drivers who receive one ticket will have their driving record reviewed and may face driving prohibitions.

If you need to make or receive a hands-free call, it is safer to pull over to the side of the road when it is safe to do so.

Dangerous emotions

You in the driver's seat

You're on your way to Vancouver Island, hoping to catch the 3 p.m. ferry. The traffic is heavy, so your progress is slow. As you approach a green light, the car in front slows down. The driver seems to be deciding whether to make a turn. You mumble under your breath in frustration. Finally, the car moves, but the light turns yellow, so you now have to stop and wait. You feel a surge of anger.
A driver like that shouldn't be on the road slowing up traffic. You just know you are going to miss your ferry.

We all have changing emotional states. Emotions are powerful forces that can interrupt the concentration you need for driving. When you are feeling very angry, anxious, sad or upset, you miss important information. Your thinking becomes unclear. Your safety and the safety of others is in danger.

Sometimes you may become angry or impatient because of the driving environment. Crowded traffic conditions and high-speed freeway driving often cause stress. Being slowed down by other traffic when you're in a hurry produces tension. Drivers who are angry or stressed are less tolerant of the mistakes that other road users make.

Whatever the cause of the emotion, it is important to look at your emotional fitness to drive. Sometimes it's best to stay out of the driver's seat.

Strategies: controlling emotions

Here are some things you can do to help you stay calm and in control while driving:

- Keep learning. Analyze stressful driving situations you have found yourself in, and figure out what you can do next time to be calmer and safer.
- Plan ahead. Choose a route that avoids crowded traffic so you can concentrate better.
- Allow yourself plenty of time. Being in a hurry can cause you to become angry or frustrated. Realize that if you leave late, you'll arrive late.

- Think of your own safety and the safety of others. This can help you calm yourself.
- Be patient and extra courteous. Remember that all drivers make mistakes. Take a couple of moments to calm yourself down and leave your problems behind before you start to drive. If you can't focus, don't get behind the wheel.
- Be honest with yourself. Admitting to yourself exactly how you feel can often help to calm you down.
- Open the windows to let in some fresh air and take a few deep breaths.
- Listen to the radio or a relaxing CD.
- Loosen your grip on the steering wheel. This will help to ease your arm and neck muscles and reduce the chance of you getting a headache.

crash fact

Throughout B.C. an average of 78 people are killed each year in crashes involving impaired driving.

Source: Police Traffic Accident System, 2010 to 2014.

Impairment

You in the driver's seat

You're going home from a party with your friend. It's pretty late and you're anxious to get to bed. It's been a long day. Your friend runs a yellow light, just catching the beginning of a red. You notice he is staring straight ahead, his eyes not moving. The car starts to weave and then lurches to one side as he brakes hard. "Hey, what are you doing?" you ask. "It's okay, I thought I was at the intersection…a little early, huh?" he laughs.

What should you do?

Facts about alcohol

Here are some ways that alcohol can interfere with seeing, thinking and doing.

Chapter 9, your licence, talks about some of the fines and charges for impaired driving.

Ability	Driver's symptoms	Effects on the driver
See	• tendency to stare	• cannot make eyes take in information quickly enough
	• eyes lose reflex abilities	• can be blinded by glare
	• reduced coordination of images	• sees double
	• reduced depth perception	• cannot judge distance and speed of other vehicles
	• reduced peripheral vision	• may not see hazards approaching from the side
Think	• reasoning becomes unclear • reduced concentration • emotional state becomes unstable	• thinks mental ability is sharp; however, cannot make sound driving decisions
Do	• reduced muscular control	• cannot coordinate steering and braking
	• increased impulsiveness	• takes greater risks by speeding or taking chances
	• reduced coordination	• oversteers; brakes late or not at all
	• slowed reaction time	• cannot make turns accurately • cannot react to emergencies quickly

Alcohol myth		Alcohol fact
Alcohol won't affect me as much if I drink coffee, have something to eat, or take a cold shower.		Only time can sober you up or lower your blood alcohol content (BAC). Contrary to popular belief, food, coffee, cold showers or exercise will not speed up the elimination of alcohol from your system. Transport Canada states that if you have a BAC of .08 it takes about six hours for your body to completely process that alcohol and return to a BAC of zero.
Beer doesn't affect driving as much as other alcoholic drinks do.		A glass of beer contains the same amount of alcohol as a glass of wine or an average cocktail. In some cases, even small amounts of alcohol can cause a driver to be impaired.

If you plan to drink, decide ahead of time how you will get home safely.

crash fact

Is it worth it to drink and drive?

- You or your passengers could be injured or killed in a crash.
- You may spend time in jail.
- You could lose your licence.
- You may have to pay stiff fines.
- Your insurance may not pay for any injuries or damage you cause.

Strategies: protecting yourself from impaired drivers

To get home safely:

- Learn about the effects of drugs and alcohol. Accurate information allows you to make informed decisions.
- Refuse to ride with drivers who may be impaired. Ask to be let out of the car if necessary.
- Take a stand — don't let someone who may be impaired drive.
- Choose a designated driver before going out.
- Keep money aside for a bus or taxi.
- Call a friend.

Facts about drugs

Drugs and driving

Drugs and medications can impair driving. If you are taking medications or drugs, you need to know how they can affect your ability to drive safely.

Drugs affect different people differently. If there is any doubt about safety, leave the driving to someone else.

driving tip

If you are feeling impaired after taking a drug or medication, don't drive — let someone else do the driving until the effect has worn off.

Medications

Over-the-counter medicines for allergies, coughs, colds and nausea can cause:

- drowsiness
- inattentiveness.

Prescriptions including sedatives, tranquilizers, painkillers and some antidepressants can affect:

- alertness
- concentration
- reaction time.

These effects can continue for many hours after the medicine is taken.

driving tip

Always read the label of any medication you are taking to see if it can affect driving. If you are taking more than one medication, ask your pharmacist or doctor about their combined effects on driving.

If your doctor or pharmacist cautions you that a medication is likely to interfere with driving safety, pay attention. If you are feeling impaired after taking a medication, don't drive — let someone else do the driving until the effect has worn off.

Illegal drugs

Recreational or street drugs such as speed, heroin and cocaine have a wide variety of effects including those noted under *Medications* on the previous page, as well as:

- hallucinations
- altered perception
- feelings of invincibility
- lack of judgment.

crash fact

A driver who combines alcohol and drugs is nine times more likely to have a crash than a sober driver.

Australian study, O. Drummer, 1994

Cannabis

Cannabis may cause a driver to:

- have difficulty following the movement of vehicles or pedestrians accurately
- misunderstand visual cues from the driving environment
- delay responses, especially in emergency situations.

Drugs and alcohol

Many drugs will greatly increase impairment when combined with even small amounts of alcohol.

Taking risks

You in the driver's seat

You're alone and driving on a straight stretch of highway. You're tempted to floor it.

What choice will you make?

New drivers differ in how they manage risk. You probably know drivers who are unsure of what actions to take and are nervous around other road users. These people lack confidence in their skills. And then there are overconfident drivers — the ones who think they are much better drivers than they really are. Both overconfident drivers and those who lack confidence need to learn more and take more time to practise their skills.

A few people adopt a dangerous driving style, seeking out excitement through speeding and taking risks. These people are thrill-seekers — they enjoy speeding, tailgating or passing unsafely.

What kind of driving style do you plan to have? Do you want to stay within your skill level? Do you think it is better to be cautious rather than take too many chances? Driving attitude or style is something you choose.

How often do you take risks?

How often do you:	Always	Sometimes	Never
Shoulder check?			
Drive within the speed limit?			
Signal?			
Avoid drinking and driving?			
Leave good space margins?			

Strategies: identifying your driving attitude or style

To identify your driving attitude or style:

- Ask someone you trust to give you some feedback on your driving skills, driving attitude and driving style.
- Analyze your attitude and style. If you have a close call, ask yourself why it happened, and think about how you can drive more safely so it doesn't happen again.
- Be critical when you watch a car ad or a car chase scene in a movie. Ask yourself: *What message am I getting? Do I agree with this message? Will this message affect my driving attitude or style?*
- Do you find yourself always blaming others for bad driving? If so, then ask yourself: *Is it really their fault or could it be me?*

Peer pressure

crash fact

Over 75 per cent of all drivers travelling at an unsafe speed resulting in a casualty collision were male. Over 37 per cent of persons killed in collisions were victims of collisions caused by unsafe speed.

B.C. Traffic Collision Statistics, Police-attended injury and fatal collisions 2007

You in the driver's seat

"Aw come on, join the party, have a drink," your friend says.

You promised to be the driver after the party. You were going to stick to soft drinks. But this is a new friend and you really like them.

What choice would you make?

It's hard to resist peer pressure. We want to belong, so we're sensitive to what others think of us. There are two kinds of peer pressure: positive and negative. Friends who persuade

you to do the safe thing because they care about you are giving positive peer pressure. On the other hand, friends or acquaintances who encourage you to do something dangerous are putting negative pressure on you.

Learning how to handle peer pressure takes a lot of practice. You want to keep your friends, but you don't want to get talked into doing things that put yourself and others in danger.

Strategies: handling negative peer pressure

Try using these four steps to help you resist negative peer pressure:

1. **Identify the problem.** You may impress your new friend if you drink, but you aren't fulfilling your promise of staying sober and being the designated driver.
2. **Think about the consequences.** If you choose to have a drink so you don't upset your friend, you increase the risk of being involved in a crash when you get behind the wheel. You could hurt or even kill yourself or someone else.
3. **Identify alternatives.** Suggest to your friend that you'll have a drink with them another time when you don't have to drive.
4. **Follow through.** Stay sober, and when you are ready to leave, offer your friends a ride.

Unsafe passengers

You in the driver's seat

You're driving home at night with a load of passengers. They're all having a good time, telling jokes and fooling around. The light rain is making it hard to see. There's a lot of reflection on the road. You need to concentrate, but you are finding it hard to think with all the noise around you.

What should you do?

When you drive, you are responsible for the safety of your passengers. Sometimes you will find that passengers can be distracting. Children often become bored with long drives and demand attention from you. Passengers may start talking loudly, teasing or wrestling in the car. This is a time when you will have to show leadership and maintain control.

Strategies: being a good passenger

As a passenger, you can help drivers:

- Avoid heated or emotional conversations, as these can distract the driver.
- Discourage reckless driving.
- Be prepared to take a stand for safety.

Strategies: keeping passengers safe

Help keep people in your vehicle safe:

- Refuse to move unless everyone is wearing a seatbelt.
- Tell children the rules before you start the trip.
- Give children activities if it's a long drive.
- Tell passengers that you will not be able to talk very much because you need to concentrate on driving.
- Use humour with your friends. For example, tell them you're not smart enough to drive and joke around at the same time.
- Make sure animals you are transporting are secured in cages. A wandering, frightened animal is a dangerous distraction.

Unsafe drivers

You in the driver's seat

Your friend offers to drive you and your buddies to the next town. It's only 20 km away so you agree. He starts down the highway and is soon way over the speed limit. He pulls out to pass a car and barely has space to get back into the lane. You quickly realize that he is a very unsafe driver.

What should you do?

Everyone's had the experience of being stuck in a car with someone whose driving scares them. Having a licence gives you more power to deal with this situation because you know the rules and regulations and you know what safe driving means. But it isn't easy to persuade an unsafe driver to change their driving style.

Strategies: stopping unsafe driving situations

Here are some ideas that could help you handle unsafe drivers:

- Try using humour — it works sometimes.
- Use "I" statements to get across how you feel. For example, you might say: *I'm feeling pretty nervous right now. Could you please slow down for me?*
- Offer to take the wheel. Tell your friend that you'd really like a turn driving.
- If there are other passengers, try to get their help. Ask: *How are you feeling right now?* Chances are they are probably feeling the same way.
- Be firm. Say something like: *Hey! Slow down before you get us killed.*
- If all else fails, ask to be let out of the car.

Aggression on the road

You in the driver's seat

It's late at night and you're driving in an unfamiliar neighbourhood. A vehicle comes speeding up behind you. The driver starts flicking the headlights back and forth from high to low beam.

What should you do?

It's often difficult to know what to do when you're faced with drivers who are aggressive. Their lack of courtesy and bad driving habits can lead to crashes. Extreme aggression, or road rage, is not common, but mild aggression can escalate if you are not careful. How should you respond?

Strategies: handling other drivers' aggression

When other drivers start acting aggressively behind the wheel:

- Respond with good driving manners. Give the other driver plenty of room and the right-of-way.
- Don't return aggression. Avoid eye contact, keep away from erratic drivers and don't gesture back.

If you're in a situation where you feel threatened:

- Get help. Drive to a police station or to a location where there are plenty of people (for example, a shopping mall).
- Call the police if you have a cellphone. (If you're travelling with someone else, get this person to make the call so you can focus on driving.)
- Don't go home.
- Keep the doors locked and the windows closed.
- Sound the horn or attract attention to yourself if someone tries to get into your car.

Preventing aggression

How can you make sure you don't increase the anger or frustration of other drivers? If you use your smart driving skills, allow plenty of space and give others the right-of-way, you can help prevent situations that cause aggression.

Strategies: preventing aggression

Help prevent other drivers from becoming frustrated or angry:

- Know the rules of the road and follow them.
- Keep a generous following distance.
- Give the right-of-way.
- Move over for merging traffic.
- Signal your intentions.
- Pull over to let other drivers go by if there is a line of vehicles behind you.
- Keep your headlights on low beam unless you're in an unlit area.
- Keep your car stereo turned down.
- Don't block passing lanes.
- Don't take more than one parking spot.
- Don't use your horn unless it's really necessary.
- Don't park in spaces reserved for people with disabilities if you're not entitled to use the space.
- Don't yell at other road users.

Sharing the road means considering other drivers. What messages do your actions give to other drivers?

BC TRANSPLANT
Provincial Health Services Authority

Right now in British Columbia, there is a very long list of people waiting for organ and tissue transplants. For some, the gift of an organ will not come in time. Yet only about a quarter of people in B.C. are registered to be organ donors.

Everyone has the potential to be an organ donor. There are no age limits.

Organ Donor Registry

In the past, you could have a decal placed on your driver's licence to show your intent to be an organ donor.

Since 1997, the Organ Donor Registry has replaced all previous ways of indicating your decision about organ donation. The Registry allows you to make an educated decision about organ donation and legally record your decision. It also removes this difficult decision from surviving family members during the grieving period — a time when this kind of decision is most difficult. The Registry is accessible 24 hours a day only to BC Transplant's organ donation health care professionals.

How to register

Organ Donor Registration forms are available at all ICBC driver licensing centres, claim centres and Autoplan brokers.

You can also register online at **www.transplant.bc.ca** or by calling 1-800-663-6189.

Please register to be an organ donor. You could save a life. And live on.