



Essential Tips for First Time Drivers

You've reached a major milestone in your life – getting your driver's license! With newfound freedom come new responsibilities. Your well-being and the safety of your passengers rest on your shoulders. Always drive sober and heed the following tips to help make your first driving experiences safe and memorable.

Slow Down! Speeding is a main factor in accidents among teen drivers and is a factor in one of every three teen crash fatalities.¹ The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported in 2008 that 37 percent of fatal crashes with 15- to 20-year-old male drivers involved speeding. The best way to avoid becoming a statistic: slow down and obey the speed limit.

Buckle Up! Not only does wearing a seat belt help prevent serious injury in an accident; it can save your life. Statistics provided by NHTSA's National Center for Statistics and Analysis indicates that wearing seat belts improves the survival rate of front-seat passengers by 45 percent. Always wear your seat belt and make sure that your passengers are buckled up as well. Remember, it's the law!

Your Attention, Please! Driver distractions cause countless accidents every day. Make driving the priority. Avoid eating, drinking, talking on the phone, texting and adjusting CD or iPod settings when driving. Don't forget to adjust the mirrors, driver's seat, steering wheel, heating or a/c and music volume before you take off. Secure loose objects like a backpack or athletic gear. Put these items in the trunk or cargo area. If unrestrained, they can become projectiles if you have to stop quickly.

Turn Off Your Cell Phone. Put your phone away while driving. There's no text or call that can't wait until you're safely off of the road. Multiple studies show that using a cell phone or texting while driving is just as dangerous as driving drunk, even when using a headset or hands-free device. If you must use your phone in an emergency, safely pull over before doing so.

Texting Can Wait. Research shows texting, on average, causes a loss of focus on the road for five seconds. Of fatal crashes among 15- to 19-year-old drivers, involving distractions, 21 percent were identified as using cellphones.² Driver distractions, such as eating, changing music and cellphone use, were indicated for 16 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes for people under the age of 20.

More is Not Always Merrier. It's very difficult to concentrate on the road when you have a car full of friends. Adults can help a new or teen driver scan the road ahead while friends or other teens cause more distractions. When driving with no adult passengers, the risk of 16- or 17-year old drivers being killed in a car crash increases 44 percent with one passenger under the age of 21; it doubles with two young passengers, and quadruples with three or more young passengers.³ Worse yet, extra passengers often result in teens driving more aggressively. If a friend is pressuring you to drive too fast or drive while intoxicated, you must be the voice of reason and just say no.

Beware the Sandman. Don't drive if you're sleepy. Pull over and find a safe place to rest. NHTSA estimates that drowsy driving is a factor in 100,000 crashes, 40,000 injuries and 1,550 deaths annually. Experts at The National Sleep Foundation say that the numbers are actually much greater. NSF estimates drowsy driving contributes to 71,000 injuries and 5,500 deaths each year.

Respect Your Ride. A well maintained vehicle is less likely to suffer a mechanical failure, which could put you in danger while you're driving. Basic maintenance, such as brake service, wheel alignment and fluid checks can keep your vehicle in working order. Don't forget to check that your tires are in good condition and make sure all exterior lights and signals work properly. If necessary, seek a knowledgeable friend, family member or trusted mechanic to help assess your vehicle's condition.

Sources: ¹ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. USA.gov, 22 Oct. 2013. Web. 16 Dec. 2013

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov>

³ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, ed. "An Examination of Driver Distraction as Recorded in NHTSA Databases." Traffic Safety Facts (2009)

⁴ Tefft, Brian C., Allan F. Williams, and Jurek G. Grabowski. "Teen Driver Risk in Relation to Age and Number of Passengers." (2012)

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