

# Road safety factsheet: Driving at night

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Driving conditions are remarkably different in the nighttime, vision is reduced, and it can be more difficult to see vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists. If you are driving at times when you would usually be asleep then you are in much greater danger of falling asleep behind the wheel.

## How to drive responsibly at night

There is much that drivers and riders can do to reduce the risk of being involved in a collision on the roads at night. The most obvious way to avoid the dangers inherent to night driving is to simply not drive at night. If the trip is necessary, other forms of transport such as rail, air, bus or coach may be safer if they are available.

If you have to drive at night, then plan the journey in advance. If you are travelling with others who can legally drive the vehicle, then consider sharing the driving. Ensure that you and any other drivers are well rested before the journey and book overnight stops where necessary. Avoid driving at times when you would usually be asleep.

You will also need to plan the route, and rest breaks at least every two hours. As mentioned, there are very few situations where drivers fall asleep at the wheel without prior warning, and to counter this you could also plan regular places along the routes where you can stop – so that if you do become fatigued, you will have planned somewhere safe to get rest.

Feeling tired when you are driving is an early warning sign that you will fall asleep at the wheel. If you choose to ignore the tell-tale signs, then the consequences can be serious. If you feel tired during the journey, then you should find somewhere to stop as soon as possible. If you are travelling with another driver, they may be able to take over the driving. If you are the only driver, then the only proven way to reduce the risk of fatigue in the short term is to drink two strong coffee drinks and to have a short nap for 15 minutes, but this advice should only be used once in the journey. Ultimately, the only thing you can do to combat falling asleep behind the wheel, is to find somewhere safe to sleep and if you still feel tired then you should find somewhere safe to stop overnight.

Vehicle lights are there for your safety and those around you - it is illegal to drive at night without fully functioning front and rear lights. You should check that all lights on the car are in full working order and kept clean before you start a journey, and if any bulbs are defective, replace them immediately. It is important to ensure that lights are adjusted correctly and don't dazzle other road users. You should also avoid driving with your lights set to main beam when vehicles are approaching.

The drop in visibility at night can lead to things appearing in view seemingly later than they would if you were driving in daylight. As a responsible driver, you should be prepared for the unexpected. To prepare yourself for any eventuality you should drive at a speed that allows you to spot hazards and react accordingly. The speed

accidents don't have to happen

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you choose should enable you to brake or manoeuvre to avoid a hazard without endangering those around you, and to stop within the distance you can see to be clear. Speed limits should never be exceeded.

If you're driving for work, you should be aware of your company's driver hours and safe driving policies, and should check routes and journey plans with your line manager. Details of establishing a safer driving policy can be found on our advice for employers [webpage](#).

### Why road users are involved in collisions at night

The most obvious danger of night driving is decreased visibility. The distance a driver can see is shortened and hazards can often seem to appear out of nowhere. It also takes time for the eyes to adjust to the darkness after being in a lit building or after driving on a well-lit road.

This can be a problem, particularly for mature road users. As we grow older, our eyes become less able to react quickly to changes in light and we can have difficulty with colours and contrasts in poor light. Between the ages of 15 and 65, the time it takes to recover from glare increases from one to nine seconds. This could be the reason why some people find driving at night more difficult.

Vulnerable road users may not be as easy to see at night, especially if they are wearing dark clothing. For this reason, it is recommended that vulnerable road users wear reflective clothing and that all road users take more care at night. Pedestrians may not have realised that you have not seen them. Cyclists can also be difficult to spot, as their lights are not as powerful as cars. It can also be more difficult to spot the single headlight of a motorcyclist at night if they are around cars.

It is important to remember that in darkness, it is harder to judge speed and distance and objects can be closer than they appear or travelling faster than first expected.

Novice drivers who have not built up experience of nighttime driving are especially susceptible to being involved in collisions at night. Novice drivers can take a further driver training scheme called Pass Plus, which contains a night driving module and will teach some of the skills necessary for safe night driving.

Even many experienced drivers do not feel comfortable driving at night. Training can help, and you could contact a local [RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders Group](#) who will be able to offer further training. You could also consider booking a refresher lesson with a local driving instructor who may be able to give you advice on driving in the hours of darkness.

For more advice on driving at night, watch our [night driving video](#).