

Road Safety Factsheet

February 2020

Driving at Night Factsheet

Driving conditions are remarkably different in the night time, 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 an accident on the roads at night. The most obvious way to avoid the dangers inherent to night driving is to simply not drive at night – and if the trip is necessary then 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 going with other people 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 pull off – 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 have another driver then 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. 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 also check that all lights on the car are in full working order and kept clean before you start a journey. It is important to ensure that lights are adjusted correctly and don't dazzle other road users. You should also avoid driving on main beam when vehicles are approaching.

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The drop in visibility at night can lead to things just appearing in view. 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 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. Of course, speed limits should not be exceeded.

If you're driving for work you should be aware of your company's driver hours and safe driving policies, you should check routes and journey plans with your line manager. Details of establishing a safer driving policy can be found on the RoSPA website through the driving for work publications.

Why Road Users Crash at Night

Road casualty statistics show that 40% of collisions occur in the hours of darkness. The danger of falling asleep at the wheel is a significant factor at night and accounts for 20% of serious accidents on motorways and monotonous roads in Great Britain.

The table below shows the number of casualties during night time hours.

Table 1: Road user casualties between 7pm and 6am, Great Britain, 2018¹

	Fatal injuries	Serious injuries	Slight injuries	Total injuries
Motorcycle users	93	1,266	2,455	3,814
Car users	336	3,122	20,825	24,283
All road users	690	6,831	29,962	37,483

The most obvious danger of night driving is decreased visibility. The distance a driver can see is shortened and so 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 older 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 1 to 9 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 are also 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.

In darkness it is harder to judge speed and distance and objects can be closer than they appear or travelling faster than first expected.

accidents don't have to happen

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Young drivers who have not built up experience of night time driving are especially more susceptible to collisions at night. Novice drivers can take a further driver training scheme called Pass Plus, which contains a night driving module and will provide 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. The Road Safety Department at your local Authority may be able to help or book a refresher lesson through a local driving instructor who may be able to give you advice on driving in the hours of darkness.

The hours of darkness are when your body is preparing to sleep, especially after a hard day at work and tiredness can set in quickly, although usually with warning signs. Driver fatigue and tiredness remains a large cause of fatalities on the night time roads. However, with the right precautions the risks associated with night time driving can be reduced because 'accidents don't have to happen'.

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

References

¹ DfT (2019) 'Table RAS30023: Reported casualties all days, by severity, road user type and hour of day, Great Britain, 2018'

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras30-reported-casualties-in-road-accidents>

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