

Road Safety Factsheet

Getting Ready for the Holiday Drive

Prepare yourself

Most road crashes are caused, or partly caused, by human error, so take time to prepare yourself, your route and your vehicle for the journey. First, make sure you are fit and well enough to undertake the journey. Ask yourself whether you are:

- Well enough for the drive, or should someone else do it?
- Well rested and ready for the drive?
- Taking any medication that advises you not to drive?
- Undergoing any medical treatment which your doctor has said you shouldn't drive while taking it?

Falling asleep at the wheel

Driving for more than a couple of hours at the end of a normal day's work (7-8 hours) significantly increases the risk of crashing, especially if driving:

- when you would normally be asleep – especially in the early hours of the morning
- in the dark
- in the early afternoon, especially after eating a moderate to heavy meal
- after drinking ANY alcohol.

Even if you do not think you will fall asleep while you are driving, tiredness can slow your reactions and affect your judgement, significantly increasing the chances of crashing. Coping mechanisms such as singing, turning the radio up, opening a window or using air-conditioning, will not keep you awake. At best, they will give you a few extra minutes to find somewhere safe to stop. See RoSPA's [Safer Journey Planner](#) and [driver fatigue factsheet](#) for advice on avoiding this risk and what to do if you start to feel tired during a journey.

Prepare your route

Plan your route in advance. Try to make your journey when there will be less traffic on the roads. RoSPA's [Safer Journey Planner](#) will help you plan your journey safely. Some of the main tips to follow include:

- Plan your route, and check the travel news for places where hold-ups may occur.
- Plan alternative routes in advance so you can use them if there is a traffic problem on your journey.
- Build in extra time to complete your journey so you do not feel stressed or in a hurry. As a general rule allow at least a quarter more time than you think it might take.
- Plan where you will stop for rest and refreshment breaks. Remember not to drive for longer than 2 hours without a break of at least 20 minutes.

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Prepare your vehicle

Before a long journey, check that your vehicle is in good working order. Make sure you check:

- Brakes
- Lights
- Tyres (wear and pressures)
- Screen washers and wipers
- Oil levels
- Coolant
- Fuel levels

Avoiding breakdowns

Things which often cause breakdowns include not having enough fuel, oil, coolant or windscreen wash and problems with drive belts and ignition systems.

Other things to consider include:

- Luggage storage: ensure that you don't obstruct your view. Store it safely (ideally in the boot) and strap luggage down to prevent it moving about if you are involved in a collision or have to brake sharply.
- If you use a roof rack, make sure it's securely fixed to your vehicle and the luggage is well strapped down.
- If you use a trailer, make sure that it is safe, legal and not overloaded and your driving licence entitles you to tow the trailer.
- Remember you cannot use the right hand lane of a motorway with three or more lanes when towing a trailer.
- Different speed limits apply when towing a trailer, 50mph on single carriageways and 60mph on dual carriageways and motorways.
- Finally, consider how a roof rack or trailer can affect the handling of your vehicle.

Prepare your passengers

Passengers, especially young children, may become restless during longer journeys, which can be distracting. You may find it helpful to:

- Show them the map or satnav route and explain where you'll be stopping off
- Make sure they have plenty of sleep
- Make certain they have enough things to keep them occupied
- Have snacks and drinks inside the car in case they become hungry or thirsty
- Take regular rest breaks.

Seat Belts and Child Restraints

Make sure you wear your seatbelt and all passengers wear their seat belt or use an appropriate child restraint. For further advice, see RoSPA's website www.childcarseats.org.uk and [seatbelts](#) factsheet.

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Driving Abroad

Make sure you know the rules of the road in any country you are visiting. Take your:

- Full driving licence
- International driving permit (if required)
- Vehicle registration document (V5)
- Motor insurance certificate (make sure it includes every country you are visiting)
- Travel insurance documents
- Passport

If hiring a car, familiarise yourself with all the controls, and make sure that it is in good working order. Before driving off, check:

Lights - All the lights are working. If using your own car abroad, you will need beam deflectors.

Mobile phone - It is illegal to use a hand held phone while driving in many countries, and of course, it is always dangerous to do so. Check the local law.

Driving on the right - If driving on the right, remember to be extra careful. It is easy to forget for a moment, especially when starting off from a petrol station when you might be momentarily distracted.

Reflective jackets - In many countries, the driver must have a reflective jacket/waistcoat in the car. In some countries they are also compulsory for passengers. Our advice is to carry two jackets and if you are hiring a car, check that they are supplied before departing the UK.

Warning Triangle - They are required in France and many other European countries.

Speed - Speed limits may vary according to the country and road type.

Alcohol - As in the UK, the best advice is not to drink any alcohol when you are going to drive. However, check the alcohol limit as it varies between countries. It is lower than England and Wales in many countries.

Drugs – Avoid taking any illegal drugs, or medications that advise against driving.

Emergency - 112 is the emergency number to key in to your phone.