

How To Drive Af

According to the National Safety Council, most people dislike driving at night. However, driving at night is sometimes necessary. Some people are driving home, some are running errands they couldn't do during the day, and some are going to parties or just out with friends.

Darkness makes driving not only challenging, but dangerous. Fatal crashes increase sharply after dark. Statistics show that your chances of being involved in a fatal traffic mishap are about two times as great at night than during daylight hours.

There are things to do, facts to know, and techniques to use that can get and keep you ready for risky night driving.

Your Car

Before you start out at night, make sure your headlights, taillights and turn signals work. A wall or showroom window makes a good place to check headlights and turn signals to see if they're working.

The better you can see, the better your chances of avoiding a mishap. Clean your headlights and windshield—inside as well as outside.

Have a service technician check your headlight aim if your inspection isn't recent, or if you've replaced a headlight. One study indicated that one-third to one-half of all vehicles on the road have



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badly aimed headlights, reducing their effectiveness for the driver and often blinding approaching drivers.

If you want to adjust your headlights yourself, you'll need 35 to 40 feet of flat space in front of a garage door or other flat surface.

- Shine your low beams on a garage door from 2 to 3 feet away.
- Outline the bright spots on the door with a soft pencil or tape.
- Back car to about 25 feet from the garage door. The top of the low beams should shine no higher than the top of the marks on the door or lower than the center of the marked circle.
- Make the necessary adjustments. On most cars, each headlight has two Phillips screws that adjust the beam up or down and left and right. These are accessible without removing any hardware.

If your car has only two headlights, the high beams are automatically aimed when you aim the low beams. If your car has four headlights, aim the low beams first. They are the outer or upper two lights. Then adjust the high beams until the center of the high is at the top of the low beam.

Your Eyes

Ninety percent of driver reaction is dependent on vision. When you come out of a lighted building, it takes a few minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark. A two-to-five-minute wait before driving off into the night could pay off.

If you spend a day in bright sunshine—such as at a beach or in the snow—it's wise to wear sunglasses that will protect against ultraviolet light rays. A day of exposure to too much sun and glare without sunglasses can drastically reduce your ability to see at night.

Don't wear any kind of sunglasses at night. There are no glasses designed to reduce headlight glare at night. Any lens that reduces the brightness of headlights also reduces the light reflected from dimly lit objects at the side of the road, particularly pedestrians.

Don't smoke while you're driving at night. In addition to the obvious distraction, nicotine and carbon monoxide (two of the ingredients in cigarette smoke) can reduce your vision when it's dark.

If you've just gotten your first pair of glasses, reduce speed and drive with extra care. In fact, some doctors recommend that people with new glasses not drive for a while after receiving them. Newly-corrected nearsighted people tend to brake too quickly, while newly-corrected farsighted people tend to brake too slowly. Also, a change in prescription may take some getting used to, and you need to consider its effect on your driving.

Do your eyes focus well? Here's a test. Look at this page for a few seconds; then raise your eyes and look across the room for a few seconds. Now look back at the print. If it's not clear immediately, your eyes may not be focusing as quickly and easily as they should. A trip to the eye doctor may be in order.

Techniques for Driving at Night

If you're wondering if it's dark enough to turn on your lights, it is. They may not help you see any better in early twilight, but it will be much easier for other drivers to see you—the better other drivers can see, the less chance of a mishap.

Since you can't see as well at night, you won't have as much time to stop when you spot trouble as you would in daylight. Reduce speed accordingly.

Switch your lights from high to low beam when an oncoming vehicle is about 500 feet away. Also, use the low beam within 300 feet (the length of a football field) of the rear of the vehicle you're following. If you're not so good at estimating distance, you'll just have to play it by ear.

Never try to give an oncoming driver a taste of their own medicine when they fail to switch to low beams. Switch your own lights from high to low, then avoid the approaching glare by watching the right edge of the road and using it as a steering guide.

Switch to low beams in fog or snow. High beams will reflect more off fog and snow, creating increased glare to throw off your vision.

Take curves slowly at night. Headlights pointing straight ahead shine off the road, reducing your view of the road considerably.

Use Forward Vision


When you look ahead, don't look only as far as your headlights light up the pavement brightly. That limits your visual range—a seeing trap into which many drivers fall. Peer ahead into the area that's only faintly illuminated. You may pick up the glow of a distant headlight or some movement that will alert you to a possible hazard.

When you spot a deer or other animal on the road at night, switch headlights to lower beam and sound your horn.

Never stop on any roadway at night. It's hard for an approaching driver to tell if your car is moving.

When Things Go Wrong

When car trouble forces you to stop at night, pull off the roadway as far as possible. Warn approaching traffic, using an illuminated or reflective device, such as a reflecting triangle. On a two-lane highway, place one ahead of the vehicle, one closely behind, and one 300 feet behind. On a divided highway, place one beside the vehicle, one 50 feet behind, and a third one 300 feet farther back.

Turn on flasher lights and your dome light. Stay away from the roadway. If you must work close to the road, try to keep approaching traffic in your field of vision. When it's necessary to stop on a narrow shoulder or other dangerous place, get all passengers out of the car. 

Driving Tip

If you ever see a yellow line on the right edge of a divided highway or ramp, you're going in the wrong direction.