

Driving After Dark

When you drive after dark your chances of being involved in a fatal traffic accident are doubled. But there is plenty you can do to boost your safety on the road after dark.

Before You Drive

Before you start out at night check your headlights, taillights and turn signals. Have your headlights checked for proper aim if you haven't done so or if you've replaced a bulb. Clean your windows—both inside and out.

The inside of a car often collects a greasy film that shows up in the glare of oncoming headlights.

Protect Your Eyes

Staying outdoors in bright sunlight all day can affect your night vision. Protect your eyes in the daytime with sunglasses. (But don't wear any kind of sunglasses at night.) When you leave a lighted building at night to get in your car, allow a few minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark before driving off. Better yet, use your lights whenever you drive.

Don't smoke while driving at night. The nicotine and carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke can reduce your night vision.

If you have difficulty seeing clearly at night, get your eyes checked. Almost everyone has some loss of night vision as they age. If you wear glasses, keep your prescription up to date and your glasses clean.

When to Use Your Lights

If you're wondering whether it's dark enough to turn on your lights, turn them on. Even if you don't yet need them to see, other drivers can see you better with them on. Better yet, use your lights whenever you drive.

If you're using your high beams, switch to low when you get within 500 feet of an oncoming car, or within 300 feet of the rear of the vehicle you're following. Avoid "reminding" an approaching car to switch to low beams. Simply avoid the approaching lights by looking to the right side of the road as a steering guide. Use your low beams in fog or snow.

Be Extra Cautious

Since you can't see as well at night, protect yourself by driving more slowly than you would in the daytime, especially around curves. Increase your following distance from three seconds to four seconds or more. Scan the road ahead, beyond the limits of your headlights. Drive at a speed that will allow you to stop in about half the distance you can see ahead.

Stopping in the road at night is dangerous. Approaching drivers can't tell you're not moving until it's too late. If you must stop, try to pull well off the road. Use your flashing lights, and place a warning device such as an illuminated triangle behind the vehicle. If the location is hazardous, get passengers out of the car.

The best night-driving practice is to avoid driving at night whenever possible.

Stay Awake

Look for onramps and offramps. Scan ahead to see when an all-night restaurant or bar is coming up. There may be traffic coming out of the parking lot.

