



Total awareness at the wheel can be literally a matter of life and death for senior roadies. Additionally, in this day of smartphones, tweeters, twitters and other devices, staying alert gets tougher. Now being at the wheel has more dangers to add to the traditional distractions.

The reality of driving, whether to the local store or across the country, is that safety is a never-ending responsibility. It's critical for senior drivers who travel long distances and spend many hours behind the wheel. Some suggestions for safe driving include:

1. Before you go, be sure your car is in excellent condition, including engine, electrical system, brakes and tires. Faulty heating units can cause drowsiness. The interior should be clean and secure from anything that could distract the driver or be propelled around on sudden stops.
2. Be in as good physical condition as your car. Get a check-up with your family doctor to be sure you're in tip-top physical shape. If on meds, know how they'll affect driving skills and alertness. If suffering from a severe cold, flu or serious physical injury, consider postponing or cancelling your trip.
3. Get at least eight hours of undisturbed, flat-bed sleep before starting out on an extended journey. Then, take an invigorating shower and eat your usual nutritional breakfast. Do at least 15 minutes of flexing exercise before taking the steering wheel.
4. Eat light throughout the day on the road. Have regular three-time-a-day meals. Don't overeat with fatty meats, desserts and breads. If the schedule is through night hours, eat light energy snacks and drink juice when you feel hungry.
5. For legal and just plain sensible reasons, don't drink while on the road. Not only could they get you into an accident and/or jail, but even a small amount of alcohol can make you drowsy and dull reflexes. Sip water frequently or from a thermos of hot tea or coffee.
6. Stop every two to three hours for potty, gas and meal breaks. Get out and do ten to 15 minutes of jogging, walking and/or flex exercises for your arms, legs and back muscles.
7. If you need to drive 1,500 to 3,000 miles, stop at a motel for at least one night for a shower, change of clothes and normal eight hours of flat bed sleep. If budget and/or time is too tight for

a motel, at midway on your journey, find a safe place to park and stretch out on the back seat for several hours.

When your very tight schedule demands driving straight through for 24 hours or more, take along an alternate driver to share four-hour shifts. Make the back seat comfortable for the off-duty driver to get adequate sleep.

8. Recognize symptoms of fatigue. It isn't wise to be on the road for eight or 12 hours straight, even if it includes a few minutes to gas up and potty breaks. When you sense the inevitable euphoria and uncontrolled eye closings beyond exhaustion, immediately pull over and get some sleep.

Many who drive without rest for too many hours experience hallucinations, such as imagined moving trees or the road rolling up toward them. Others report they unavoidably nod off for just a second, causing danger of swerving off the road or into oncoming traffic.

9. Take advantage of latest electronics. Keep them charged and going constantly so you'll stay alert for conditions ahead. They're valuable sources on road blockages, alternate routes, emergency police services, motels and other info.

10. Staying healthy, awake and alert while driving is the most important task a senior on a long road journey must do. It can actually be a matter of life or death.