

# FACT SHEET

## NRSP Heavy Vehicles Toolbox Talk



In Australia, **drink driving** is responsible for 18% – 30% percent of fatalities or **over 200 deaths annually** <sup>[1]</sup>.

After alcohol with 25–30%, **Marijuana (15%) is the second most common drug** found in road fatalities in Victoria <sup>[2]</sup>.

The misuse of prescription drugs, especially in combination with alcohol, **significantly increases the risk of being involved in a road crash or incident** <sup>[3]</sup>.



## The Issue

Alcohol and many prescription drugs and over the counter medications can adversely affect such skills impairing driving ability and placing you and others on the road at risk. The issue with impairment is you feel fine driving in a straight line, but when an unexpected event occurs and you suddenly must respond, your reflexes are slowed down.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is a measure of grams of alcohol in the body per 100 millilitres of blood. Australia has strict laws around driving under the influence of alcohol, with a legal BAC limit of 0.05 <sup>[4]</sup>.

The BAC levels and their effects on driver behaviour <sup>[1]</sup>:

**0.02 to 0.05 BAC** — The tendency to take risks is increased, and the ability to respond to several stimuli is decreased.

**0.05 to 0.08 BAC** — At 0.08 BAC drivers are five times more likely to have a road incident than before they started drinking.

**0.08 to 0.12 BAC** — Drivers are up to 10 times more likely to have an incident.



One of the most preventable causes of road incidents and fatalities is the use of Alcohol and/or Drugs while driving. **Between 2012 and 2016, 1 in 5 drivers with a BAC over 0.05 were killed in a crash** <sup>[5]</sup>.

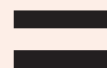
In many studies, it has been found that there is an association between the use of alcohol and other drugs and crashes. Alcohol and drugs impair the mental capacity of a human being, and therefore, effect their driving ability. **In Australia, 30% of fatal road accidents are caused by drivers drinking or using illicit substances in 2015** <sup>[6]</sup>.

Each one of us requires a different time period to process alcohol and recover from these symptoms, which may carry over well into the next day <sup>[7]</sup>.

For professional drivers it is illegal to drive a vehicle while impaired by drugs, which includes prescription and over-the-counter medicines <sup>[8] [9]</sup>.

Side-effects of prescription medication includes drowsiness, shakiness, blurry vision, slower reaction times, poor coordination, confusion, and difficulties to concentrate <sup>[10]</sup>.

**It is estimated 1 in 4 Australian drivers ignore medication warning labels** <sup>[3]</sup>.



There is evidence of the statistical association between marijuana use and increased motor vehicle crash risk. Its use has consistently been found that impair driving performance, cognitive functions, and increase the risk of a crash, to the point of “moderately diminish virtually every driving-related capacity” <sup>[11]</sup>. **Even when prescribed by a GP, medicinal Marijuana can impair driving, and driving under its influence is an offence** <sup>[12] [13]</sup>.

The National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program has found the concentration in sewage water of drugs commonly used as pain killers is particularly high in regional areas. The use of such medications in combination even with a moderate amount of alcohol, significantly increases the risk of being involved in a road crash <sup>[3]</sup>.

# Recommendations

## Know Your Body

Many of us enjoy a good night out with good company and a few drinks. However, we need to be careful about just how much we drink and when we stop drinking because any alcohol consumed will stay in the body for quite some time. **All bodies work in a different way, and the time it takes for yours to process alcohol may be longer than your friends' or the average of 1 hour per standard drink. It has been proven alcohol stay in our systems up to 72 hours<sup>[7]</sup>.**



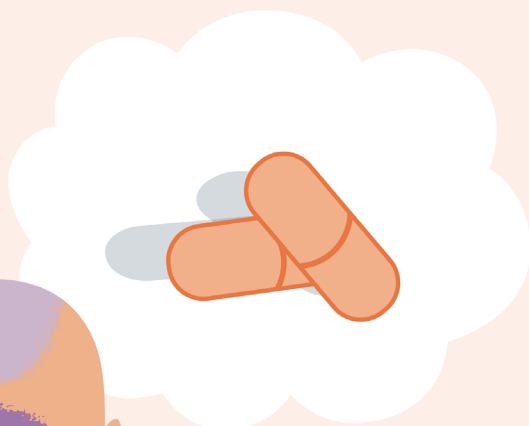
## Prescription Drugs

### Managers<sup>[3]</sup>:

When informed by a team member of the consumption of a medicine, ensure there is a valid and appropriate prescription.

Conduct a fitness for work assessment that includes physical and cognitive activities.

Assist the worker to discuss alternative effective treatments and their impairing effect with a pharmacist or GP.



## Prevention Strategies

### Know your employer's AOD policy – it may be Zero Tolerance

If you plan to drink, don't drive.

If you plan to drink, create a Journey Management Plan that includes:

- Organise a designated driver, use public transport or 'grab a cab'.
- Do not let friends drive after drinking.
- Plan accommodation ahead of time and/or monitor your drinks.

Remember alcohol and other substances stay in our bodies for long periods of time<sup>[7]</sup>. Know what your organisation Alcohol and Drugs management plan entails.

Following a 'big night' and still feeling it – take leave! However, don't let this become a habit!



### Drivers:

Follow the indications given by your pharmacist or GP. Know by misusing or abusing medicines you are increasing the risk of serious side-effects<sup>[14]</sup>.

- Inform your GP you drive for work and what the task involves. Discuss the impact different types of medications could have on your body and how they could affect your professional activities.
- Check with the pharmacists whether it safe to drive (professionally).
- Inform your employer you are taking medications and if there is any type of related limitation or impairment you could be facing.

Know prescription medicines have an impairing effect on some of our skills and abilities, with some components remaining in your system for even longer than 24 hours<sup>[3]</sup>.

If using multiple medications inform your pharmacist and GP as they may conflict.

If you recently started taking one or more prescription medicines and are feeling unwell, stay home and inform your manager.