



Total alertness at the wheel can be literally a matter of life and death for senior roadies. However, in this day of smartphones, ipods, tweeters, twitters and other devices, staying alert now creates more distractions.

The reality of driving, whether to the local store or across the country, is that safety is a constant responsibility. This is especially critical for senior drivers who travel long distances and spend many hours behind the wheel. Some suggestions for safe driving include:

1. Before hitting the road, be sure your car is in excellent condition, including engine, electrical system, brakes and tires. Ventilation must be functioning safely, especially heating and air conditioning. The interior should be clean and secure from obstructions that could distract the driver or be propelled around on sudden stops.
2. Be sure you're in as good physical condition as your car. Get regular check-ups with your family doctor to be sure to be in tip-top physical shape. If on meds, ask your doctor how they affect driving skills and alertness. If suffering from a severe cold, flu or serious physical injury, consider postponing your trip.
3. Get at least eight hours of undisturbed, flat-bed sleep before you begin. Take an invigorating shower and eat a nutritional breakfast. Do at least 15 minutes of flexing exercise before starting on a long drive.
4. Eat light throughout the day on the road. Keep your body on its regular three-time-a-day meals. Don't overeat with fatty meats, desserts and breads. If driving goes through night hours, munch energy snacks when hungry.
5. For legal and just plain sensible reasons, no beer nor booze while on the road. Not only could they get you into an accident and/or jail, but even a small amount of alcohol in your system can cause nodding off and dull reflexes. Sip frequently from a container of water and thermos of tea or coffee.
6. Stop every two to three hours, including when you need potty, gas and meal breaks. Do ten to 15 minutes of jogging, walking and/or standing flex exercises for arm, leg and back muscles.
7. If you need to drive cross-country in priority time, stop at a motel for at least one night. Get a

shower, change of clothes and normal eight hours of flat bed sleep.

If schedule demands driving straight through for 24 hours or more, take along another driver to share four-hour shifts. If you can't spend time for rest stops, make the back seat comfortable for the off-duty driver to stretch out and get adequate sleep.

8. Recognize the symptoms of fatigue. It's physically difficult to be on the road for eight or 12 hours straight, even with a few minutes to gas up and potty breaks. When drivers begin to get the inevitable euphoria and uncontrolled eye closings beyond exhaustion, it's time to pull over and get some safe sleep.

Many who drive without rest for long 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. Keep radio, smartphone and/or GPS going constantly so you'll stay alert for road conditions ahead. Frequently check info on accidents, alternate routes, emergency police services, gas stations, motels and other on-the-road necessities.

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