



Backgrounder

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Tips for Safe Night Driving from the Motor Vehicle Lighting Council

If you plan on driving after the sun goes down, it's important to remember that driving at night presents different challenges than driving during the day. Traffic death rates are three times greater at night, yet many of us are unaware of the hazards that night driving poses or effective ways to handle them.

At night, vision is severely limited. Drivers lose the advantage of color and contrast that is available during the day and depth perception and peripheral vision are also diminished. As we age, our ability to see and recover from oncoming glare is reduced and our field of view decreases, making it even more difficult to drive at night.

To improve your night vision and driving ability after sunset, the Motor Vehicle Lighting Council (MVLIC) offer drivers these tips:

1. **Use your lights courteously** – turn your headlights on one hour before sunset to make it easier for other drivers to see you in early twilight. Keep your headlights on at least one hour after sunrise. Refrain from flashing your high beams at a vehicle with its high beams on, this will only increase the chance that two drivers will not be able to see. In fog, use only your low beam headlights; high beams reduce your own ability to see and may temporarily blind other drivers. If your vehicle is equipped with fog lamps, use them with your low beams only when there is fog or inclement weather.
2. **Make it easy for others to see you** – be sure all exterior vehicle lights work properly. In case of a vehicle breakdown, pull completely off the road beyond the end of the guardrail, if possible, and turn on emergency flashers.

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3. **Avoid glare** – instead of looking at oncoming headlights, look toward the right side of the road and watch the white line marking the outside edge of the traffic lane. When headlights from vehicles following you reflect in your rearview mirror, use the “day-night” feature on the mirror or adjust your mirror to cut out as much of the light as possible.
4. **Adjust your vehicle’s interior lighting** – if street lights cause a lot of glare, dim your dashboard lights and use your sun visor. Avoid using any other light inside your vehicle.
5. **Keep all windows and headlights clean** – dirty windows can increase glare, making it more difficult to see, while dirty headlights can reduce efficiency by as much as 90 percent. Be sure to clean the inside and outside of your windshield as well as your headlights.
6. **Keep your eyes moving** – look for flashes of light at hilltops, curves and intersections that may indicate the headlights of other vehicles.
7. **Increase your following distance** – increasing your distance by four to five seconds can make it easier to spot potential problems on and along the roadway and give you more time to respond. In addition, proper lighting will enable you to react quicker and stop at a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you.
8. **Regulate speed** – driving too fast is more dangerous after dark than during the day because of decreased visibility. Traveling at high speeds doesn’t allow you enough time or distance to stop when you see something dangerous on the road ahead.
9. **Prevent fatigue** – night driving can be tiring, so ensure good ventilation inside the vehicle and take frequent refreshment breaks to give your eyes a chance to recover. Take a short nap or a brisk walk, or have some caffeine to help you stay alert.
10. **Use vehicle mirrors to your advantage** – exterior mirrors that are properly aligned not only reduce blind spots, they also reduce glare from vehicles behind you. The outside rearview mirrors should be adjusted so that the body work of the vehicle is just outside of the driver’s view. In addition, the rearview mirror can be flipped to its “day-night” setting which changes the angle of the reflective surface and appears to dim the mirror.

In addition there are also some general practices you can follow to help ensure safe night driving:

1. **Align your headlights correctly** – properly aligned headlights will help you see the road better and will help other drivers avoid glare. If you live in a state that requires regular safety inspections, ask the service technician to check and correct the aim of your headlights. If your state doesn’t require such an inspection, take your vehicle to a dealer or repair shop at least once a year for a headlight checkup.

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2. **Have your vision checked regularly** – the American Optometric Association recommends that everyone under the age of 40 have a thorough eye exam at least every three years; drivers 41-60 every two years; and drivers over 60 every year. Age can make eyes more sensitive to glare. In addition, certain medical conditions, such as encroaching cataracts, will increase eye sensitivity.

3. **Look into anti-reflective eyeglass coating** – many eye care professionals strongly recommend eyeglasses that have an anti-reflective (AR) coating. This ultra-thin film reduces internal reflections in the lenses. AR-coated glasses actually transmit more light than regular lenses, which improves vision at night and helps distinguish fine details during the day.

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