
BEING IN SHAPE TO RIDE

Riding a motorcycle is a demanding and complex task. Skilled riders pay attention to the riding environment and to operating the motorcycle, identifying potential hazards, making good judgments and executing decisions quickly and skillfully. Your ability to perform and respond to changing road and traffic conditions is influenced by how fit and alert you are. Alcohol and drugs, more than any other factor, degrade your ability to think clearly and to ride safely. As little as one drink can have a significant effect on your performance.

Let's look at the risks involved in riding after drinking or using drugs. What to do to protect yourself and your fellow riders is also examined.

WHY THIS INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT

Alcohol is a major contributor to motorcycle crashes, particularly fatal crashes. Studies show that 29 percent of all fatally injured motorcycle riders had BAC levels above the legal limit of 0.08 percent. An additional 8 percent had lower alcohol levels (BAC 0.01 to 0.07 percent), demonstrating that having only a drink or two in one's system is enough to impair riding skills. Drug levels are harder to distinguish or have not been separated from drinking violations for the traffic records. But riding "under the influence" of either alcohol or drugs poses physical hazards and legal consequences for every rider.

Drinking and drug use is as big a problem among motorcyclists as it is among automobile drivers. Motorcyclists, however, are more likely to be killed or severely injured in a crash. Injuries occur in 90 percent of motorcycle crashes and 33 percent of automobile crashes that involve abuse of substances. On a yearly basis, 2,000 motorcyclists are killed and about 50,000 seriously injured in this same type of crash. These statistics are too overwhelming to ignore.

By becoming knowledgeable about the effects of alcohol and drugs you will see that riding and substance abuse don't mix. Take positive steps to protect yourself and prevent others from injuring themselves.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS IN MOTORCYCLE OPERATION

No one is immune to the effects of alcohol or drugs. Friends may brag about their ability to hold their liquor or perform better on drugs, but alcohol or drugs make them less able to think clearly and perform physical tasks skillfully. Judgment and the decision-making processes needed for vehicle operation are affected long before legal limitations are reached.

Many over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs have side effects that increase the risk of riding. It is difficult to accurately measure the involvement of particular drugs in motorcycle crashes. But we do know what effects various drugs have on the processes involved in riding a motorcycle. We also know that the combined effects of alcohol and drugs are more dangerous than either is alone.

ALCOHOL IN THE BODY

Alcohol enters the bloodstream quickly. Unlike most foods and beverages, it does not need to be digested. Within minutes after being consumed, it reaches the brain and begins to affect the drinker. The major effect alcohol has is to slow down and impair bodily functions — both mental and physical. Whatever you do, you do less well after consuming alcohol.

BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION

Blood Alcohol Concentration or BAC is the amount of alcohol in relation to blood in the body. Generally, alcohol can be eliminated in the body at the rate of almost one drink per hour. But a variety of other factors may also influence the level of alcohol retained. The more alcohol in your blood, the greater the degree of impairment.

Three factors play a major part in determining BAC:

- **The amount** of alcohol you consume.
- **How fast** you drink.
- **Your body weight.**

Other factors also contribute to the way alcohol affects your system.

Your sex, physical condition and food intake are just a few that may cause your BAC level to be even higher. But the full effects of these are not completely known. **Alcohol may still accumulate in your body even if you are drinking at a rate of one**

drink per hour. Abilities and judgment can be affected by that one drink.

A 12-ounce can of beer, a mixed drink with one shot (1.5 ounces) of liquor, and a 5-ounce glass of wine all contain the same amount of alcohol.

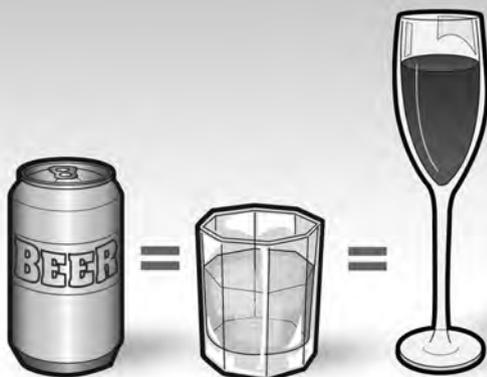
The faster you drink, the more alcohol accumulates in your body. If you drink two drinks in an hour, at the end of that hour, at least one drink will remain in your bloodstream.

Without taking into account any other factors, these examples illustrate why time is a critical factor when a rider decides to drink.

If you drink:

– Seven drinks over the span of three hours you would have at least four ($7 - 3 = 4$) drinks remaining in your system at the end of the three hours. You would need at least another four hours to eliminate the four remaining drinks before you consider riding.

ALCOHOL CONTENT



ALCOHOL AND THE LAW

In all states, an adult with a BAC of 0.08 percent or above is considered intoxicated. In Michigan for operators under age 21, it is illegal to drive with a Bodily Alcohol Content of 0.02 or greater, or to have any presence of alcohol other than that consumed at a generally recognized religious ceremony. It doesn't matter how sober you may look or act. The breath or urine test is what usually determines whether you are riding legally or illegally.

Whether or not you are legally intoxicated is not the real issue. Impairment of judgment and skills begins well below the legal limit.

Your chances of being stopped for riding under the influence of alcohol are increasing. Law enforcement is being stepped up across the country in response to the senseless deaths and injuries caused by drinking drivers and riders.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONVICTION

Years ago, first offenders had a good chance of getting off with a small fine and participation in alcohol-abuse classes. Today the laws of most states impose stiff penalties on drinking operators. And those penalties are mandatory, meaning that judges must impose them.

If you are convicted of riding under the influence of alcohol or drugs, you may receive any of the following penalties:

- **License Suspension** — Mandatory suspension for conviction, arrest or refusal to submit to a breath test.
- **Fines** — Severe fines are another aspect of a conviction, usually levied with a license suspension.

- **Insurance Rate Increase** — A DUI/DWI conviction can put you into a “high risk” category. So, having a DUI on your driving record means you’ll be paying for it long after your court or legal interactions have ended.
- **Community Service** — Performing tasks such as picking up litter along the highway, washing cars in the motor-vehicle pool or working at an emergency ward.
- **Costs** — Additional lawyer’s fees, lost work time spent in court or alcohol-education programs, public transportation costs (while your license is suspended) and the added psychological costs of being tagged a “drunk driver.”

MINIMIZE THE RISKS

Your ability to judge how well you are riding is affected first. Although you may be performing more and more poorly, you think you are doing better and better. The result is that you ride confidently, taking greater and greater risks. Minimize the risks of drinking and riding by taking steps before you drink. Control your drinking or control your riding.

MAKE AN INTELLIGENT CHOICE

Don't Drink — Once you start, your resistance becomes weaker.

Setting a limit or pacing yourself are poor alternatives at best. Your ability to exercise good judgment is one of the first things affected by alcohol. Even if you have tried to drink in moderation, you may not realize to what extent your skills have suffered from alcohol's fatiguing effects.

Or Don't Ride — If you haven't controlled your drinking, you must control your riding.

- **Leave the motorcycle** — so you won't be tempted to ride. Arrange another way to get home.
- **Wait** — If you exceed your limit, wait until your system eliminates the alcohol and its fatiguing effects.

STEP IN TO PROTECT FRIENDS

People who have had too much to drink are unable to make a responsible decision. It is up to others to step in and keep them from taking too great a risk. No one wants to do this — it's uncomfortable, embarrassing and thankless. You are rarely thanked for your efforts at the time. But the alternatives are often worse.

There are several ways to keep friends from hurting themselves:

- **Arrange a safe ride** — Provide alternative ways for them to get home.
- **Slow the pace of drinking** — Involve them in other activities.
- **Keep them there** — Use any excuse to keep them from getting on their motorcycle. Serve them food and coffee to pass the time. Explain your concerns for their risks of getting arrested or hurt or hurting someone else. Take their key, if you can, and secure their bike.
- **Get friends involved** — Use peer pressure from a group of friends to intervene.

It helps to enlist support from others when you decide to step in. The more people on your side, the easier it is to be firm and the harder it is for the rider to resist. While you may not be thanked at the time, you will never have to say, "If only I had ..."

MARIJUANA AND MOTORCYCLE OPERATION

Marijuana is gaining acceptance as having legitimate medicinal applications and as a recreational drug in the United States, as evidenced by recent trends in state laws permitting its use. As of early 2014, 20 states allowed marijuana for medical use, and two allowed it for recreational use by people 21 and over.

Although marijuana may be legal for medicinal or recreational use in your state, it is still not legal, safe, or wise to operate a motor vehicle while impaired by marijuana, since it tends to distort your perception of time, space and speed. This is especially critical for motorcycle riders, who must continually make detailed assessments of complex traffic situations and make split-

TEST YOURSELF

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If you wait one hour per drink for the alcohol to be eliminated from your body before riding:

- You cannot be arrested for drinking and riding.
- Your riding skills will not be affected.
- Side effects from the drinking may still remain.
- You will be okay as long as you ride slowly.

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second decisions requiring precise rider input to navigate safely and maintain an adequate safety margin.

States are beginning to set marijuana impairment limits based on blood content levels of marijuana's primary psychoactive ingredient, THC. However, compared to alcohol and BAC level, it is difficult to determine the relationship between the amount of marijuana ingested and the resulting THC level in the blood. Complicating factors include marijuana's potency, which is highly variable, and ingestion method, which has significant bearing on the onset and duration of impairment. When marijuana is smoked, its effects generally begin within a few minutes and can last from 2 to 4 hours. But when marijuana is eaten the onset of effects could be delayed for more than an hour and the duration of the "high" could be more than 6 hours.

Be safe. Do not operate your motorcycle or any motor vehicle if you are impaired by marijuana, and find alternate transportation if you are planning to be under the influence of marijuana at your destination. Just as with alcohol, riders impaired by marijuana can be convicted of riding under the influence, and be subjected to similar harsh penalties.

FATIGUE

Riding a motorcycle is more tiring than driving a car. On a long trip, you'll tire sooner than you would in a car. Avoid riding when tired. Fatigue can affect your control of the motorcycle.

- **Protect yourself from the elements**
— Wind, cold, and rain make you tire

quickly. Dress warmly. A windshield is worth its cost if you plan to ride long distances.

- **Limit your distance** — Experienced riders seldom try to ride more than about six hours a day.
- **Take frequent rest breaks** — Stop and get off the motorcycle at least every two hours.
- **Don't drink or use drugs** — Artificial stimulants often result in extreme fatigue or depression when they start to wear off. Riders are unable to concentrate on the task at hand.