Driving Safely Despite the Distractions of ADHD

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ADHD and Driving

One of the many areas of your life ADHD can cause difficulty in is your ability to drive. Young drivers with ADHD are up to four times more likely to have an accident while driving as compared to their peers without ADHD, studies have shown. They have three times the risk of having an accident leading to a physical injury, four times the risk of being at fault for the accident and are three times more likely to have their driver's license suspended. Therefore, an adult with ADHD has to be several times more careful and cautious as compared with someone without ADHD just to avoid car accidents and related problems. Research studies also show that 40% of individuals with ADHD who drive had two or more accidents, while the same issues happen less often (6%) in those without ADHD. Let's look at why ADHD sufferers have more troubles while driving, and how to minimize the risks and drive safe.

ADHD and Driving Risk Factors

ADHD affects a number of areas that are key to driving safely, including attention, reaction time, and ability to follow rules. While immaturity and inexperience are risk factors faced by young adults without ADHD, young adults with ADHD face eight risk factors that raise the risk of car accident: immaturity, inexperience, impulsivity, inattention, poor judgment, distractions, aggression, and impaired executive function skills.

Tips for Maintaining Focus While Driving

- **Switch electronics off –** Turning off your mobile phone and other electronic devices when driving. The use of cell phones and other electronic devices has been linked with an increased risk of being distracted, near collisions and car accidents. Turning off the device completely removes the temptation to use it during a trip.

- **Don't multitask –** Focus on driving only; keep both hands on the steering wheel and your eyes on the road at all times. Eating, drinking, grooming, adjusting the radio and trying to reach for various objects in the car are all hazardous activities that can cause accidents, no matter how trivial they seem.
- **Avoid rush hour –** Do your best to avoid peak-hour traffic, which is more likely to trigger your road rage.
- **Go manual –** Driving a car with a manual transmission may help you or your teen focus better, because it keeps your hands busier and gives your attention less time to wander.
- **Don't drink –** Although most states allow drivers to drink a small amount of alcohol before getting behind the wheel, for people with ADHD it's safer to drink no alcohol at all if you're planning on driving.
- **Take lessons –** Even if you've been driving for a while, a driving course can be a great way to learn safer driving habits and unlearn bad habits.
- **Take breaks –** If you are on a long trip, take regular breaks and allow time to rest when you need to.
- **Teen-parent contract agreement –** If you have a teen with ADHD, talk to them before they start driving lessons. Agree on some driving rules, like what hours your teen can drive and whether they can drive with passengers in the car, and set consequences for if those rules are not followed (e.g. loss of driving

privilege). The contract can be modified as the teenager shows more maturity and trustworthiness.

- **Drive solo –** Teens who travel with another teen passenger (especially male) in the car are more likely to suffer a fatal car accident. Consider a rule (perhaps as part of the contract agreement mentioned above) preventing your teen from driving friends for an extended period of time, until he/she gains more driving experience.

If you have ADHD, make sure you have options available to you for when you don't think you're able to drive safely. Have a friend you can call or cash on hand so you can call a cab. Likewise, if you have a teen with ADHD make sure they know they can call you at any time to come pick them up if they don't feel they can concentrate well enough to drive. These extra precautions can go a long way towards keeping you safe on the road despite your ADHD.