

New study to investigate the effect of driving while medicated

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Researchers from the University of Sydney are using an advanced driving simulator to investigate whether painkillers and relaxants increase the risk of having a car crash.

The world-first study underway at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital is using an advanced driving simulator to assess driver performance after taking low doses of codeine and oxazepam. These are medicines commonly used to treat headache and anxiety.

Dr. Stefanie Leung, Principal Researcher and founding member of the Research on [Alcohol Drugs](#) and Driving (RoADD) group, said that the impetus for the study had been the alarming number of crashes in which the driver had tested positive to an everyday [medicine](#).

"People generally believe that it is safe to drive after taking medicines, simply because they have been prescribed by a doctor and are being used responsibly," she said.

"While it is widely accepted that recreational drug use impairs driving, it now appears that taking prescribed medicines could also compromise safety on the road. In particular, benzodiazepines (relaxants) and [opioids](#) ([painkillers](#)) have been implicated in approximately 15 percent and 4 percent of crash injury cases at Australian hospitals. This then raises the question - should people be driving if they are taking medicines?"

"There is poor understanding of how medicines affect driving. We want

to improve that understanding and raise awareness of the risks of driving while taking medication, and hopefully help to reduce the senseless road toll.

"This is not about marginalizing people that have to take medicines. This is about ensuring everyone's safety on the road."

Provided by University of Sydney

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