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The challenges of driving

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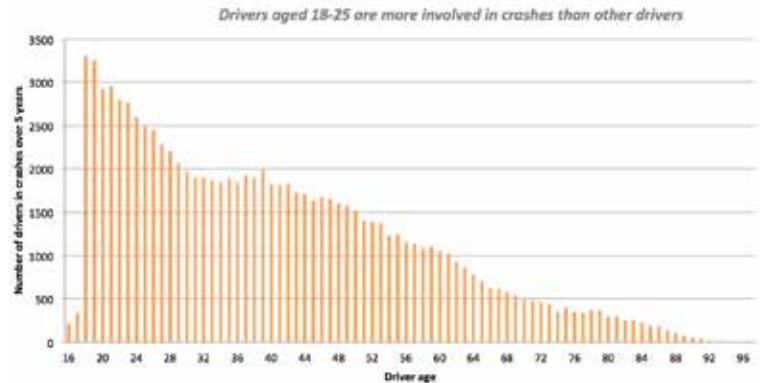
This graph shows how driver safety changes with experience. The periods with the highest line on the graph are the times of greatest crash risk.

You can see that learners do not have many crashes, and that the number of crashes jumps up to very high levels as soon as people first get their probationary licence. It then decreases slowly over the next few years.

The graph shows four important things:

- You are relatively safe as a learner driver with a supervising driver to help you. This is why Victoria has a long learner driver period and a 120 hour requirement. This is the best time to learn the skills you need to be a safer driver.
- The highest crash risk is associated with new P plate drivers. When you start to drive on your probationary licence you will have the highest risk of crashing that you will ever have as a driver. This is why Victoria has special requirements for new drivers and a Graduated Licensing System (GLS).

- Your crash risk will go down over the first few years of driving experience, but you will still have a relatively high risk of crashing for those first few years. This is why Victoria has a four-year probationary period for most new drivers.
- Your risk of crashing will slowly decrease for many years after you get your licence (see also graph below).



The challenges of driving

Driving is not that easy

Driving is complicated. Safe drivers have to handle many different challenges, such as:

- different traffic conditions – from light traffic in local streets to heavy peak hour traffic on busy highways
- rural and country roads
- extremes in weather – rain, fog or icy conditions
- different driving manoeuvres in busy traffic – driving in roundabouts, changing lanes or turning at different types of intersections
- poor visibility – night driving or sun glare when driving at dawn or dusk
- unexpected actions of other road users – stopping quickly, merging or turning without warning, or pedestrians rushing onto the road without looking
- different types of roads – freeways, divided and undivided highways, main roads, gravel roads or roads with trams
- bad road surfaces – potholes, gravel or slippery surfaces
- any of these challenges when there are distractions inside the car – radio, passengers or mobile phones.

Even a common driving task like turning right at an intersection is complicated:

- As you approach the intersection you will need to start slowing down at the right time, drive at a safe speed and decide whether you'll need to stop completely.
- You will need to be aware of other road users. Cars around you might change lanes or stop suddenly and there may be pedestrians about to cross the road.
- If you change lanes you will need to choose a safe gap between other cars. You will need to use your mirrors, do **head checks**, change gears if necessary and use turn indicators at the right times.
- As you make the turn you need to be aware of potential hazards like oncoming cars and other road users around the intersection. Choosing a safe gap in oncoming traffic is a significant challenge for new drivers.

The best time to gain experience with these driving challenges is when you are a learner driver and you have a supervising driver with you.

The challenges of driving

Some facts about new solo driving

New solo drivers are more likely to be involved in:

- crashes that involve losing control and driving off the road, most often on straight sections of road
- crashes at an intersection when turning right in front of an oncoming vehicle
- crashes at an intersection where they are hit by a right turning vehicle
- crashes into the rear of another vehicle where the new solo driver is often in the vehicle that hits the car in front. See diagrams on the next page.

Definition

A **head check** means looking over your shoulder to see things through the rear side windows – but don't take your eyes off the road ahead for more than a second.

These crashes occur because new drivers sometimes make mistakes. They:

- misjudge gaps in traffic
- drive too fast for the conditions
- drive too close to other cars
- are slower at recognising potential hazards
- are easily distracted
- do not look further ahead than the car in front of them
- sometimes take risks.

These mistakes are not due to poor car control skills. They relate to poor responses to the road environment and other drivers. New drivers concentrate too much on car control skills rather than observing what is happening around them.

New solo drivers have a high risk of crashing because they don't have as much experience as other drivers. Getting at least 120 hours of experience as a learner in many different driving situations is the best thing you can do to reduce your crash risk.

Common crash types for novice and young drivers

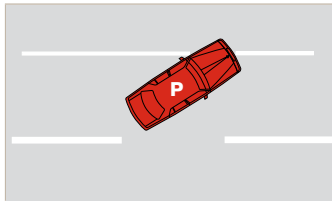


fig 1. Single vehicle crash

- Travel at speeds suitable for traffic conditions and the road environment.
- Slow right down on unfamiliar roads and areas.
- Don't go beyond your own driving skills or your car's limits.

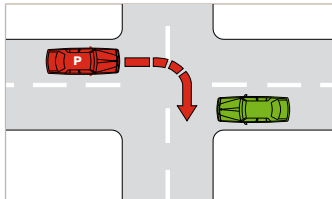


fig 2. Turning right at an intersection

- Reduce speed and slow down before entering intersections.
- Wait for a safe gap before turning.
- Make eye contact with other drivers.
- If you can't see if any traffic is coming – WAIT!

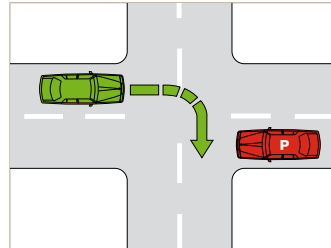


fig 3. Hit by a right turning vehicle

- Slow down before entering intersections and look out for vehicles turning across your path.
- Don't change lanes near intersections.
- Make eye contact with other drivers.
- Don't assume another driver will give way to you.

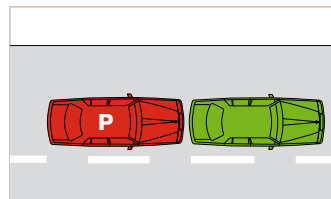


fig 4. Rear end

- Increase following distances.
- Reduce speed.
- Travel at speeds suitable for traffic conditions.