

Hitting the road on your next trip? Whether you're heading to Grandma's with the kids or hitting Route 66 for a cross-country jaunt, don't leave home without our tried and tested driving tips. Read on to learn more about avoiding traffic, saving money, and staying safe (and staying awake!) on your next road trip.

- 1.** Before beginning a long drive, always get enough sleep and eat something before you go. Highly caffeinated beverages are not necessarily the best way to stay awake while driving. While initially you will feel more alert, the effects can recede with time, and your attention may wander although you remain awake.
- 2.** Pull over and take breaks every couple of hours, even if you don't feel sleepy. Grab a snack, get some fresh air, and stretch your legs by walking around. If you need to, take a quick nap.
- 3.** If you can, share the driving responsibilities with someone else. This will allow you to keep an eye on each other while driving and also enable you to nap without losing time. If you're driving alone, turn on the radio or put on some music, and keep your window cracked open. You may also want to refrain from using your cruise control if you're driving alone at night -- having to concentrate on maintaining your speed can help you stay awake.
- 4.** If you do have to pull over -- pull off the road. Never park on the shoulder or in the breakdown lane for any reason except an emergency.
- 5.** Know the laws along your route concerning cell phone use while driving. While it may be legal in one place, it may be illegal in another, and ignorance is not typically an acceptable excuse for a violation. Here's a handy chart of [cell phone laws by state](#) (keep in mind that this information can change at any time). However, even if it's legal to talk on a cell phone where you're going, it's usually safest to use a hands-free device.
- 6.** If you don't know this one, shame on you. Never drink any alcohol before your trip. While you may not become intoxicated from one beer, you will become sleepy.
- 7.** Keep an eye on the skies, and if you can, plan a route around [inclement weather](#). A minor detour could actually wind up saving you major time.
- 8.** Search the Web for traffic update sites and listen to radio traffic alerts, especially when approaching major cities. All-news stations on the AM dial are often your best bet.
- 9.** You should plan out your exact route before you even leave the house -- but bring along a map just in case. While many folks like to print directions from [Mapquest](#), Traveler's Ed examines a few other options in [Mapping on the Web](#).
- 10.** If you are driving a rental vehicle, familiarize yourself with the car and all of its equipment (horn, brakes, hazard lights).

**11.** Lock all of your valuables (especially items that are clearly gifts) in the trunk or glove compartment and stow all luggage in the trunk.

**12.** Familiarize yourself with local traffic laws, which vary from state to state and especially overseas. Is it legal to make a right turn at a red light? What are the rules on yielding to pedestrians?

**13.** Before setting off on a long car trip, be sure your vehicle is in prime condition -- that tires are properly inflated, that all fluids are at their proper levels and that you have a full tank of gas. (For particularly long road trips, you may want to have your mechanic do a more thorough check.)

**14.** Consider becoming a member of AAA or signing up for your car insurer's roadside assistance program. You won't regret it when your car breaks down on a lonely back road.

**15.** Keep costs down by conserving gas as you drive. Minimize sudden starts and stops, empty your car of all unnecessary weight, and slow down -- it takes much less fuel to drive 55 miles an hour than it does to drive 70

**16.** Don't wait until your gas gauge is sitting on E to refuel. On an unfamiliar road, you never know when the next gas station will appear. As soon as you hit a quarter of a tank, start looking for a place to fill up.

**17.** When traveling with kids, be sure to stop often -- not just for snacks and potty breaks, but also for fun. See a cool playground along the way? Pull over and throw a Frisbee around. You'll also want to pack toys, books and music for the car -- not to mention your motion sickness remedy of choice.

**18.** Feeling munchy? Stock up on snacks and drinks at grocery stores rather than gas stations or convenience stores -- you'll get a wider and healthier selection, as well as better prices.

**19.** On longer trips, keep napkins, plasticware and a small cooler handy for meals on the go. You'll also want some spare change for tolls, as well as a first-aid kit, flashlight, pillow and blanket. Keep a set of jumper cables, a spare tire or donut, and extra fluids for the car (such as windshield wiper fluid) in your trunk.

**20.** This last tip should go without saying, but it's important enough that we'll say it anyway: Make sure everyone in the car buckles his or her seatbelt. Not only will it keep you safe, but in many places it's also the law.