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Safe and Fun Vacations

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What better time of the year is there for taking vacations than summer? The days are long, the temperatures are warm and the urge to get away — whether it's for sightseeing or visiting friends and Family — is too hard to resist. But before you head out, remember safety!

Vehicle maintenance

You may be ready to hit the road, but what about your vehicle? Have you checked the tires for proper air pressure and wear? What about checking that spare to make sure it's properly inflated? And then there are your fluid levels. Low engine oil, brake and transmission fluid or coolant can strand you beside the road short of your destination. If you're a Soldier, make sure your vehicle has passed a unit safety inspection. If you're not a mechanic, be sure to visit your favorite garage for a good pre-travel check. After all, it's better your car starts the trip with a quick visit to the garage than ends up with a long, expensive stay in one.

Also, getting where you're going is like practicing marksmanship; you're only as good as your aim. Be sure to complete a TRiPS assessment at https://safety.army.mil/trips to hit the mark for safety.

Sightseeing

Enjoying your "eyeball tour" of the great mesas out west or the beautiful mountains on the Blue Ridge Parkway? Just remember, you tend to go where you look. If you're driving on a mountain road gawking at a beautiful valley below, you may get there sooner than you think. Take advantage of scenic pullouts to gaze at the scenery and take pictures. It's better to pull off the road where it's safe than run off the road where it isn't.

Some like it hot

What would summer be without the sun? Nice, toasty rays to tan the skin and warm the spirits. Still, today's tan can turn into tomorrow's cancer. The folks at the U.S. Army Public Health Command advise sunbathers to apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 30 a good 15 minutes before heading out into the sun. Make sure you apply it everywhere it's needed, including the face, lips, hands, arms, shoulders, ears, back of neck, under the chin and top of the head. Also, unless you want to end up looking like burnt toast, avoid getting your daily dose of sunshine between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Thirsty? Think twice about slaking that desire with soda or other caffeinated drinks, energy shots or adult beverages. While they may be refreshing at the moment, they're diuretics that actually remove what your body needs most — water. You've heard, "What goes in must come out." With hydration, it's the other way around: What comes out (sweat) must be replaced by what goes in (water). The USAPHC recommends you drink at least eight to 10 cups of water per day, 10 to 12 if you're really having fun in the sun.

Wet and wild

Water and watercraft are another fun mix during summer vacations. However, boozing and boating can leave you floating, or maybe dead. Because there are no marked lanes or stoplight-controlled intersections, boating puts you in the center of 360 degrees of danger. Can you afford to be less than fully alert? Also, while it's great to be in the water, it's not so wonderful when the water is inside you. Never go out on the water without wearing a properly fitted, Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device, otherwise known as a life jacket. Should you not know how to swim, land unconscious in the water or become fatigued trying to swim to safety, your life depends on that jacket.

While you're filling up your vacation with fun, don't forget to add a little composite risk management. Keep an eye out for hazards and assess them, then come up with a plan to stay safe and use it. The last part, supervise and evaluate, is what you do when you come home, rest in your easy chair and remember what a good and safe time you had. After all, coming home alive is part of the plan!

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