

Ask Dr. K®: Writings For Your Mental Health

LEFT LANE DRIVERS

Dear Dr. K.,

Can you help me? How do I cope with motorists who insist on driving very slowly in the left lane on a four-lane highway like Interstate 75 or Rte 41? It's bad enough out of season but now with these slow drivers returned to the area for the winter, it's only worse. They drive me crazy by not moving to the slower right lane. What can I do?

Desperate to get to my destination
Jonathan, NYC

Dear Jonathan,

I hope you don't mind that Dr. K asked me, Dr. Bob, to help you out. You sound pretty bad, but maybe with the following insights I've know, you'll be able to calm yourself down and enjoy driving again.

You must understand that someone driving slowly in the left lane is not simply some stubborn person trying to be impish. The obsessive need by some people to drive like that is an extremely complex problem that has undergone much research by three highly respected groups: the Florida Department of Tourism (whose new 2008 motto is 'Drive slow anywhere so you can stop and buy things and spend lotsa' money in Florida'); the American Association of Left-Lane Only Drivers and the Florida White-Belt, White-Shoes, Eat-Dinner-Before-5 PM-Society. Their findings show that this behavior can have many causes including our primitive instincts, chickens (don't ask me why), neurological problems, diet, psychiatric disorders, political upheavals and the American God-given right to assert oneself. Let me explain.

Having gathered data from numerous sites around the world, archeologists agree that prehistoric man, as he went through the jungle, walked on the left side of the path. These scientists concluded that our early ancestor was carrying his spear in his right hand and, when threatened, would jump for cover to the left. In this way, he would have his right hand free to throw his spear at whatever was threatening him. If he was on the right side, his right hand would be in the bushes and he might have been eaten. As a result, modern man still has this strong primal urge to go to the left as a primitive survival trait. These leftist urges have nothing whatsoever to do with political leanings.

There are a number of neurological problems that can cause left-lane seeking behavior that cannot be controlled by an individual. The most commonly known problem is "Mirror Disease" named after

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Dr. Francois Mirror of Des Moines. People can be born with this problem or they can develop it later in life. What happens is that the right and left sides of the brain get mixed up so you see things backwards and right becomes left and left becomes right...“For these people, it’s just like looking into a mirror with everything reversed,” says Dr. Mirror. People with this disease actually think they are driving on the right but because of the “Mirror Effect” they are in the left lane. This problem can be caused in the developing baby if the pregnant woman walks backwards a lot thereby confusing brain cells that go in the opposite direction in forming the brain. It also can occur if the expectant mother spends at least 4 months in Australia which, as you know, has everything backwards to us (their summer is our winter). They also drive on the left side for some barbaric reason.

Mirror Disease can occur later in life if you watch food go back and forth too much on the revolving tray in a microwave that causes the brain parts to switch sides while being cooked by microwaves. Couch potatoes who lie on one side of their head too long may have the upside of the brain pulled to the down side by gravity thus causing Mirror Disease. There is no treatment for this problem although having a person sitting next to you constantly nagging on how to drive has been helpful in limited cases.

The other well-known neurological problem is “I Think My Wife Is A Hat Syndrome” which is caused by smelling too many gas fumes while filling your tank or getting tanked. This brain problem causes the person to see everything cockeyed. So you see your wife (or husband) as a hat, your socks look like pancakes and *ALL* highway signs have no meaning whatsoever. Thus, any sign pointing to a left or right lane or how fast you should go is viewed as nonsense and therefore to be avoided. There is, tragically, no cure for this wretched problem although watching a ‘slinky’ go down steps has been helpful to a few souls.

The combined resources of the Betty Crocker Food as a Fine Art Institute and The Aunt **Jemima** School for Social Research have discovered that various foods influence our brain chemistry that affects how we feel and view things. Of course, the average beer drinker could have told you this. Crucial data from these research centers describe the effect that “left-overs” have on brain chemistry and therefore on our functioning. Scientists have found that a diet heavy in left-overs activates the enzyme “lefto-mase” in the brain. This enzyme is usually dormant but when triggered causes the affected person’s right arm muscles to go into spasm, pushing out and pushing the steering wheel (yes, you guessed it) to the *left*. Many slow left-lane drivers are actually eating leftovers from Bob Evans as they drive. Avoiding leftovers and a diet rich in stuffed cabbage (which will keep you home with gas) help keep these drivers off the road.

There are many psychiatric conditions that compel individuals to drive slowly in the left lane. An intriguing but little heard of malady occurs in people who think they are werewolves (Magnus malus

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lupus syndrome). It is a little known fact (except to people who believe they are werewolves who know all about this) that they must drive their cars in the left lane slowly in order to look for victims. Fortunately for us, the Florida DMV forbids giving driver's licenses to werewolves (since they eat tourists who then can't spend money here) so the problem is rarely seen on our highways.

There is a variant of manic-depression called "Left-O-Mania" the frenzied desire to drive in the left lane when overly excited. When this occurs, the driver usually drives fast and is the one hanging on *your* bumper to move over. However, this cycle is usually followed by "Left-O-Depression" where the person drives *very* slowly. A jazzy song on the radio or an RC Cola has been known to help this problem.

A number of anxiety problems cause people to stick in the left lane. The most famous is "I'm going to the turn left in 5 miles so why go into the left lane syndrome." These people are extremely anxious about change in their lives and love routine. Changing lanes, especially with a turn coming up, causes them so much stress that they choose not to move over. A variant of this problem is the "I'm going to slow down eventually so why speed up in the first place disease."

Both of these problems are treated with much reassurance, kindness, holding the caffeine and taking the car keys away.

There are the people who dislike themselves and drive in the left lane slowly for the abuse. Remember that with these people, your abusing them only makes them happier.

Some persons were scared as children by right-handed people (think of Captain Hook). As adults, they suffer with "Right-o-phobia" the fear of anything on the right. These people simply cannot drive on the right because of the anxiety it causes them. Theirs is a special kind of hell because if they have to go somewhere, they must keep making left turns to get there until they arrive at their destination. They can never say, "I'll be *right* over."

So, Desperate, you can see that, although your impatience at these slow, left lane drivers is justified, there are many complicated reasons that people may be doing this.

You must learn to cope with this recurring and never-ending problem as the rest of us do...by going into the right lane and passing the car while yelling obscenities. That is the healthy way.

Dr. K