

Detection and Prevention of sleepiness while driving

[This advice is taken from the American National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website. <http://drowsydriving.org/about/detection-and-prevention/> (accessed 150527). Please look up the NHTSA website for more information on drowsy driving and road safety.]

DID YOU KNOW? Being awake for 18 hours is equal to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08%, which is legally drunk and leaves you at equal risk for a crash

How can you tell if you are driving while “drowsy”?

Your eyelids droop and your head starts to nod. Yawning becomes almost constant and your vision seems blurry. You blink hard, focus your eyes and suddenly realize that you've veered onto the hard-shoulder or into oncoming traffic for a moment and quickly straighten the wheel. This time you were lucky; next time you could become the latest victim of the tragedy of drowsy driving.

According to the National Sleep Foundation's 'Sleep in America' poll' 60% of Americans have driven while feeling sleepy and 37% admit to actually having fallen asleep at the wheel in the past year. However, many people cannot tell if or when they are about to fall asleep. And if sleepiness comes on while driving, many say to themselves, "I can handle this, I'll be fine." Yet they're putting themselves and others in danger. What they really need is a nap or a good night's sleep.

Here are some signs that should tell a driver to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable

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SPECIFIC AT RISK GROUPS

The risk of having a crash due to drowsy driving is not uniformly distributed across the population. Research has identified young males, shift workers, commercial drivers, people with untreated sleep disorders and those with either short-term or chronic sleep deprivation as being at highest risk.

- **Young people:** especially males under 25 years old.
- **Shift workers and people with long work hours:** working the night shift increases your risk by nearly six times.
- **Rotating-shift workers**
- **People working more than 60 hours a week** need to be particularly careful.
- **Commercial drivers:** especially long-haul drivers. At least 15% of all heavy truck crashes involve fatigue.
- **People with undiagnosed or untreated disorders:** People with untreated obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) have been shown to have up to a seven times increased risk of falling asleep at the wheel compared to those without OSA.
- **Business travellers:** who spend many hours driving or may be jet lagged.

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Before you drive, check to see if you are:

- Sleep-deprived or fatigued (6 hours of sleep or less triples your risk)
- Suffering from sleep loss (insomnia), poor quality sleep, or a sleep debt
- Driving long distances without proper rest breaks
- Driving through the night, mid-afternoon or when you would normally be asleep
- Taking sedating medications (antidepressants, cold tablets, antihistamines)
- Working more than 60 hours a week (increases your risk by 40%)
- Working more than one job and your main job involves shift work
- **Drinking even small amounts of alcohol**
- Driving alone or on a long, rural, dark or boring road

BEFORE “HITTING THE ROAD”, DRIVERS SHOULD

- **Consult their physicians** or a local sleep disorders centre for diagnosis and treatment if they suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, often have difficulty sleeping at night, and/or snore loudly every night.
- **Plan to drive long trips with a companion.** Passengers can help look for early warning signs of fatigue or switch drivers when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver.
- **Get a good night’s sleep.** While this varies from individual to individual, sleep experts recommend between 7-9 hours of sleep per night for adults and 8 ½ to 9 1/2 for teens.
- **Avoid alcohol and medications** (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Alcohol interacts with fatigue, increasing its effects — just like drinking on an empty stomach.
- **Schedule regular stops**, every 100 miles or two hours.
- **Take a 15 to 20-minute nap** (more than 20 minutes can make you groggy for at least five minutes after awakening).

IF YOU FEEL SLEEPY WHILE DRIVING:

BE AWARE OF RUMBLE STRIPS

- If you hit a shoulder rumble strip, pull off the road as soon as possible. Rumble strips are deep grooves placed on high-speed roads utilized by highway authorities to alert drowsy drivers and prevent them from veering off the roadway. They were first introduced on the New Jersey Turnpike in 1952 and have proven to be one of the most effective measures in decreasing drowsy driving.

STOP DRIVING

- Find a safe place to pull over and stop for a break or for the night.

DRINK A CAFFEINATED BEVERAGE

- If you become drowsy while driving, recognize that you are in danger of falling asleep and pull over.
- Coffee or another type of caffeine drink can promote short-term alertness. Consume the equivalent of two cups of coffee.

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- Caffeine is also available in soft drinks, chewing gum and tablets.
- Caffeine and a nap together offer short-term benefits. Just be aware that it takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream. **So, have the coffee before the nap.**
- Keep in mind that caffeine won't have much of an effect on people who consume it regularly.

TAKE A NAP

- Pull off into a safe, well-lit area away from traffic and take a brief nap.
- 15-20 minutes is best. Short naps can help improve mood, performance and short-term alertness. If you plan on napping longer than 20 to 30 minutes, you may want to consider finding a safe place to get a full night's rest. Longer naps may result in sleep inertia, leaving you groggy and disoriented, which can be detrimental to driving.

STOP AND REST SOMEWHERE FOR THE NIGHT

- If you plan on napping longer than 30 minutes, your best option is to choose a safe rest stop or motel, allowing you to get 7 to 9 hours of sleep. This is the recommended amount of sleep for adults and will leave you feeling recovered, refreshed and well-rested the next day on the road. If possible, request a cool and quiet room away from elevators, ice machines or busy roads in order to avoid late night noise.

Measures **WITHOUT** lasting benefit:

- The following measures do not provide lasting benefit to counter sleepiness while driving. At best, they may help for very short periods of, say, 10 minutes or so.
- These include:
 1. Winding the windows down
 2. Turning up the volume of the radio in the car
 3. Stopping and taking a brisk walk for a few minutes