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## **DROWSY DRIVING**

Data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates that an average of 83,000 police-reported crashes are caused by fatigued drivers each year, resulting in nearly 900 deaths and 37,000 injuries. According to National Sleep Foundation surveys more than half of Americans consistently report that they have driven drowsy. Two out of five admit to falling asleep at the wheel according to a 2010 study from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Drowsiness/fatigue may play a role in crashes attributed to other causes. About one million crashes annually are thought to be produced by driver inattention/lapses. Sleep deprivation and fatigue make such lapses of attention more likely to occur.

### **Who Is At Risk?**

- All drivers who are:
  - sleep-deprived or fatigued
  - driving long distances without rest breaks
  - driving through the night or at other times when they are normally asleep
  - taking medication that increases sleepiness, or drinking alcohol
  - driving alone
  - driving on long, rural, boring roads
  - frequent travelers, e.g., business travelers.

### **At Highest Risk for Drowsy Driving**

- Young people (ages 18 to 29), especially males.
- Shift workers, students, or others whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours.
- People with untreated sleep apnea syndrome (SAS) and narcolepsy.
- People who drive between midnight and 6 a.m.

### **Prevention**

- Before motorists embark on their trips, they should:
  - Get a good night's sleep. While this varies for each individual, the average person requires about 8 hours of sleep a 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.
  - Schedule regular stops, every 100 miles or 2 hours.



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- 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.
- Consult their physicians or a local sleep disorders center for diagnosis and treatment if they suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night often, and/or snore loudly every night.

### **Once driving, motorists should:**

- Look for the warning signs of fatigue, for example, drivers who:
  - can't remember the last few miles driven
  - drift from their lanes or hit a rumble strip
  - experience wandering or disconnected thoughts
  - yawn repeatedly
  - have difficulty focusing or keeping their eyes open
  - tailgate or miss traffic signs
  - have trouble keeping their head up
  - keep jerking their vehicles back into the lane.
- Recognize that they are in danger of falling asleep and cannot predict when a microsleep may occur.
- Not count on the radio, open window or other "tricks" to keep them awake.
- Respond to symptoms of fatigue by finding a safe place to stop for a break.
- Pull off into a safe area away from traffic and take a brief nap (15 to 45 minutes) if tired.
- Drink coffee or a functional energy drink to promote short-term alertness if needed. (It takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream.)

*Some content drawn from material previously published by the National Sleep Foundation.*

#### **Acknowledgments:**

[National Sleep Foundation](#)

[National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#)



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