



DROWSY DRIVING PREVENTION



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It is difficult to determine how many fatal vehicle accidents are the result of drowsy driving, but it is estimated that up to 6,000 fatal crashes in the United States may be caused by drowsy drivers each year.¹ While falling asleep at the wheel is obviously dangerous, driving while being sleepy can be equally risky.² Driving while sleepy makes drivers less attentive, impairs reaction time and information processing, and affects a driver's decision-making ability.³ Being awake for 18 hours can cause cognitive impairment similar to having a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05%.⁴ After 24 hours without sleep, impairment becomes similar to a BAC of 0.10%, higher than the legal limit in all states.⁴

There are many risk factors that can contribute to drowsy driving, including lack of sleep, consumption of alcohol, untreated or unrecognized sleep disorders, use of certain medications (both prescription and over-the-counter), or irregular driving patterns, like driving late at night or for long periods of time.⁵ Young adults ages 16 to 29, shift workers, and individuals who are sleep deprived or who suffer from untreated sleep disorders are most at risk for driving drowsy.⁵

Prevention Tips

To reduce the risk of drowsy driving and its consequences, follow these tips:

- ▶ Plan to get sufficient sleep based on your age. Adults need 7-8 hours of sleep each night and adolescents need a bit more, about 9-10 hours each night.⁶
- ▶ Do not drink alcohol before driving.
- ▶ Be aware of side effects of medications you are taking and how your medications may interact with each other. Taking certain medications together can cause sleepiness.
- ▶ Limit driving between midnight and 6 a.m.⁵
- ▶ If feeling sleepy, pull over and take a short nap (15 to 20 minutes) in a safe, well lit area.⁵
- ▶ Consume caffeine, such as two cups of coffee, for a short term way to increase alertness.⁵
- ▶ Consult your physician if you regularly feel tired to ensure early detection and treatment of any illnesses that can cause drowsiness.²

¹ Tefft BC, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. Asleep at the wheel: the prevalence and impact of drowsy driving. Washington, DC: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety; 2010. <http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/2010DrowsyDrivingReport.pdf> [PDF - 653KB]. Accessed March 2015.

² Drowsy Driving: Asleep at the Wheel. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/dsDrowsyDriving/index.html>. Updated 6 January 2014. Accessed 16 March 2015.

³ Jackson ML, Croft RJ, Kennedy GA, Owens K, Howard ME. Cognitive components of simulated driving performance: sleep loss effects and predictors. *Accid Anal Prev*. 2012;50:438.

⁴ Dawson D, Reid K. Fatigue, alcohol and performance impairment. *Nature*. 1997;388(6639):235.

⁵ Drowsy Driving and Automobile Crashes. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/drowsy_driving1/Drowsy.html. 9 March 2006. Accessed March 2015.

⁶ How Much Sleep is Enough? National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sdd/howmuch>. Published 22 February 2012. Accessed March 2015

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