

## Sleepiness and Driving

Drowsy driving is a serious problem. About 1 out of every 3 people have fallen asleep while driving. Traffic accidents from drowsiness are more likely to be major and can cause death. About 20 percent of traffic accidents that result in death are due to drowsy driving.



### Who is at risk for drowsy driving?

People who are at the greatest risk of drowsy driving include:

- younger adults
- men
- shift workers
- commercial drivers, and
- frequent travelers.

In addition, people who:

- work long hours
  - do not get enough sleep
  - take medications that make them sleepy
  - drink alcohol, or
  - have untreated sleep problems
- are at higher risk for drowsy driving.

### What are the warning signs that suggest that you are too sleepy to drive?

- Difficulty focusing
- Missing traffic signs or exits
- Vehicle drifting
- Losing track of time
- Daydreaming
- Heavy eyelids and frequent blinking
- Yawning frequently
- Nodding your head
- Feeling restless or irritable

### Drowsy driving is preventable.

Here are a few tips to prevent drowsy driving:

- **Make sure you get enough sleep.**  
Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep each day. Getting less than 6 hours of sleep makes you 3 times more likely to have a motor vehicle crash.
- **Do not drive if you are drowsy.**  
If you are feeling sleepy while driving, you should pull over in a safe place to rest and get some sleep before driving again. You can take a brief nap (15-20 minutes). Long naps can make you groggy and can worsen your ability to drive. You can also have someone who is not sleepy drive for you.



- **Schedule regular breaks for long road trips.**  
Take a break at least every 2 hours or every 100 miles. It is best to stop somewhere safe to get a full night's rest.

- **Travel with someone who can trade off driving.**  
That person should be rested when it is his or her turn to drive.
- **If you work night shift, be sure that you are fully awake and alert before driving.**
- **Avoid drinking alcohol, using marijuana, or taking other substances or medications that make you sleepy before driving.**
- **Avoid distractions.**  
Listening to the radio, rolling your window down or talking on the phone using a handsfree device may briefly help you focus if you are drowsy. However, these can create distractions while driving that can increase your risk of a traffic accident. It is always advised that you stop driving if you are too sleepy to drive.
- **Caffeine does not replace getting enough sleep.**  
Caffeine may briefly make you feel more alert; however, once the caffeine wears off in about 3-5 hours, you will feel just as drowsy or more so than you did before you had the caffeine. You can become tolerant to caffeine so that it takes more to keep you awake.



- **Practice good sleep habits.**  
Using electronics or having caffeine before bedtime, along with other bad sleep habits, can negatively affect the quality of your sleep.
- **If you think you have a sleep problem, talk to your healthcare provider.**



- **Get treatment if you have a sleep problem such as sleep apnea or insomnia.**

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### Sleep Resources

#### American Thoracic Society

- [www.thoracic.org/patients/](http://www.thoracic.org/patients/)

#### National Sleep Foundation

- <http://sleepfoundation.org/>
- <http://drowsydriving.org>

#### Sleep Education— American Academy of Sleep Medicine

- [www.sleepeducation.com/](http://www.sleepeducation.com/)

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