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Traffic Safety Newsletter

Drowsy Driving



Are you feeling exhausted after the holiday season? Make sure that when you get behind the wheel you are well-rested and alert. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, there were 633 deaths from drowsy-driving-related fatalities in 2020 in the United States. This number may or may not be even larger; the exact number of drowsy-driving-related crashes, injuries, and fatalities is impossible to calculate. You are three times more likely to be in a car crash if you are fatigued. Keep reading to learn about the causes of drowsy driving, learn who is at risk, how to recognize the warning signs, and tips to stay alert.

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Causes of Drowsy Driving and Who Is At Risk



No driver is immune to drowsy driving, and the driver doesn't have to completely fall asleep for drowsy driving to be dangerous. A driver may doze off for just a few seconds, which is called a microsleep. Though it may be only seconds, a vehicle can travel the length of a football field if this happens at highway speeds. So, what causes drowsy driving? Some potential causes may be, but are not limited to:

- Sleep deprivation: Adults need at least seven hours of sleep per night. Research shows that sleep deprivation leads to

mental impairment that is similar to drunkenness. [According to the National Safety Council](#), driving after going more than 20 hours without sleep is the equivalent of driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.08% – the U.S. legal limit. Worse reaction times, awareness, and attention span are present in drowsy drivers.

- Sleep disorders: Sleep disorders interrupt a good night's sleep and may cause a person to have extensive daytime drowsiness. An example of a disruptive sleep disorder is sleep apnea.
- Medication: Always check the list of side effects on any medication before operating a vehicle. Even over-the-counter medications may have drowsiness as a side effect.
- Alcohol: Drinking alcohol can make the user tired.
- Time of day and length of drive: [According to the Sleep Foundation](#), crashes from drowsy driving occur most frequently between midnight and six A.M. or in the mid-afternoon, which are two times when sleepiness peaks. Longer drive times without frequent stops may also induce tiredness.

[According to the CDC](#), certain drivers are at a higher risk of drowsy-driving-related crashes, including:

- People who drive for a living, such as commercial truck drivers,
- People who work long hours, irregular shifts, or night shifts,
- People who take medications that result in sleepiness,
- Teenagers with less driving experience and poor sleep habits, and
- People with sleep disorders.

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The Warning Signs



It is always better to stop and take a break than to keep driving if you are feeling tired. A drowsy driver is a danger to themselves and any other road users around them. Some of the signs that you need to stop and take a break are:

- Frequent yawning
- Tired eyes or frequent blinking
- Hitting rumble strips
- Missing exits or turns
- Inability to maintain speed
- Inability to remember the last few miles driven

If you need to pull over and take a break, make sure that you are choosing a safe spot to do so. Look for signs for public rest stops or other public areas, such as gas stations, that wouldn't mind someone stopping for a small nap. Avoid pulling your vehicle into the shoulder to stop for a rest. Stopping on the shoulder when not necessary puts you at risk to be hit by a moving vehicle.

Take the quiz at the link below to test your knowledge about falling asleep at the wheel.

**Test Your
Knowledge**

How to Stay Alert



Preparing yourself to stay alert while driving involves more than just making a pit stop for coffee. Coffee and energy drinks are a quick fix for fatigue, and the effects wear off very quickly. Planning your drive, whether it is just the daily drive to work or a long road trip, should be done well ahead of stepping into your vehicle. Here are some tips to make sure you are as alert as possible while driving:

- Make it a priority to get the proper amount of sleep each night. Adults need at least seven hours of sleep per night.
- If you are planning a long trip, plan to get enough sleep the night before.
- Advise teens to delay driving until they're well-rested. Teens need even more sleep than adults.
- Do not drive after drinking alcohol.
- Always check your prescription and over-the-counter medication labels to see if drowsiness could result from their use. If you take medications that could cause drowsiness as a side effect, get a ride from family/friends or use public transportation when possible.
- Avoid driving during the peak sleepiness periods (midnight – 6 A.M. and late afternoon), if possible.
- Drive with a friend in the car if you're taking a long trip. If you start to get tired, they can take over the task of driving.

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