

Sleep Sheet

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

LOOK FOR THE WARNING SIGNS OF FATIGUE WHILE DRIVING

Many people cannot tell if or when they are going to fall asleep. When they become drowsy, they say to themselves, "I can handle this," because they want to drive. Yet they put themselves and others in danger when, what they really need, is a nap or a good night's sleep. Watch for these signs that may tell you that you need to stop and rest:

- ▼ *Difficulty focusing or keeping your eyes open*
- ▼ *Trouble keeping your head up*
- ▼ *Yawning repeatedly*
- ▼ *Wandering, disconnected thoughts or daydreaming*
- ▼ *Feeling restless and irritable*
- ▼ *Trouble remembering the last few miles driven*
- ▼ *Drifting from your lane or hitting a shoulder rumble strip*
- ▼ *Tailgating*
- ▼ *Missing traffic signs or exits*

DROWSY DRIVING

DON'T CROSS THAT LINE

When you drive, you take responsibility for your safety and the safety of others on the road. According to recent studies, more than half of American drivers have driven while drowsy and 20-30% have fallen asleep at the wheel. Many also report that when drowsy, they drive faster, lose patience and become stressed. The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) conservatively estimates that 100,000 crashes each year are caused by sleepy drivers, resulting in more than 1,500 deaths and 71,000 injuries.

■ Sleepiness Impairs Performance Like Alcohol and Drugs

Studies reveal that many people do not know when they are sleepy. Driving requires a set of skills that are significantly reduced when you are sleep deprived. Studies show that being awake 18 hours is as great a risk as driving drunk. This reduced ability to drive can make the difference — in whether you avoid or cause a crash. Drowsiness can cause:

- Slower reaction time
- Impaired judgment and vision
- Decline in attention to important signs, road changes and the actions of other vehicles
- Decreased alertness, preventing you from seeing an obstacle and avoiding a crash, especially when driving in the dark or for a long period of time
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behavior

■ **Driving while drowsy puts ALL of us at risk.**

Are You at Risk?

Before you drive, check to see if you are:

- Sleep-deprived or suffering from poor quality sleep: six hours of sleep or less triples your risk
- Driving long distances without planning a rest break
- Driving at night, between midnight and 6 am when you are normally asleep and during the mid-afternoon when there is a natural tendency to sleep
- Driving alone or on a long, rural, dark or boring road
- Taking medication that may cause sleepiness such as cold tablets, antihistamines or antidepressants
- Drinking even small amounts of alcohol

Persons at Risk:

- Shift workers: This is particularly true if you work the night shift, as your risk is nearly six times greater, or if you have a rotating shift or work more than one job.
- Commercial drivers: Those who drive a high number of miles and drive during the night are at higher risk for fall-asleep crashes.
- Young adults, especially males aged 16-29 years of age; peak age occurrence for drowsy driving crashes is at 20 years of age
- Persons with untreated sleep problems or disorders (e.g. insomnia, sleep apnea, narcolepsy); people with sleep apnea have up to seven times greater risk
- Business travelers who spend many hours driving or may be experiencing jet lag
- Persons who work more than 60 hours a week increase their risk by 40%.

■ **Sleeping is the most effective way to prevent and decrease sleepiness.**

Prepare for a Trip

Here's what you can do to be more alert and prevent drowsy driving before a trip:

- Get a good night's sleep, preferably eight hours, especially before a long trip.
- Travel with a companion to help watch for signs of fatigue.

- Schedule regular stops every 100 miles or 2 hours and find a safe place for a nap or break.
- Avoid alcohol and sedating medications as they impair performance.

■ **Alcohol interacts with sleepiness to increase drowsiness and impairment.**

Preventing a Fall-Asleep Crash

If you become drowsy while driving, recognize that you are in danger of falling asleep at the wheel.

DO NOT

- Depend on the radio, an open window, a change in the temperature in your vehicle or other "tricks" to keep awake.

DO

- Stop driving.
- Find a safe place to stop for a break or for the night.
- Pull off into a safe, well-lighted (if at night) area away from traffic and take a brief nap: 15-20 minutes is best.
- Drink coffee or other type of caffeine drink to promote short-term alertness if needed. (It takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream). Caffeine is also available in soft drinks, chewing gum and tablets. Caffeine and a nap together offer short-term benefits.
- Get off the road if you hit shoulder rumble strips. These are deep grooves that are placed on high-speed roads to alert you when you are leaving the road.

If you are experiencing frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night or suspect you have a sleep-disorder, consult your physician.