



Important Things to Know About Drowsy Driving

- Driving while you are tired can make your driving worse than if you have been drinking alcohol.
- People under 25 are most at risk.
- If you work shifts, you need to be careful that you are not too sleepy to drive.
- If you're drowsy, a 15 minute nap is long enough to lower your risk of a crash. You can learn to recognise the warning signs.

Have you ever driven while drowsy?

Many people drive while they are drowsy. Some are able to recognise that there is a problem, but most are unaware that their driving is being affected. Sleepy drivers start yawning, their eyes go out of focus and they cannot remember driving the last few kilometres. A survey in the US found that as many as 6 in 10 drivers drive while they are drowsy. The problem is that people are very bad at knowing whether it is affecting their driving and whether they are too drowsy to drive. Falling asleep happens quickly and without much warning.

How bad can it make your driving?

If you drive after 17 hours without sleep, your performance is as bad as driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.05 percent. Getting up at 7 in the morning, staying awake during the day, going out in the evening and then driving home at midnight gets you to this level. Twenty four hours without sleep is as dangerous as driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.10 percent.

Who is most at risk?

Statistics show that more than half of the drowsy driving accidents involve people 25 years or younger. **Shift workers** are also at high risk, as are long distance truck

drivers. People with sleep disorders such as **Central Sleep Apnoea** and **Obstructive Sleep Apnoea** have a much higher risk of having an accident that is due to their sleepiness.

What are the warning signs?

Usually, there are warning signs that indicate that there is a high risk that an accident will occur. These are:

- Sleepiness
- Eyes closing or going out of focus
- Trouble keeping the head up
- Cannot stop yawning
- Wandering thoughts, difficulty concentrating on driving
- Cannot remember driving the past few kilometres
- Drifting between lanes, off the road or miss signs
- Very heavy eyelids
- Slow blinking

What strategies can help prevent drowsy driving?

If you need to drive a long distance, particularly at night or in the sleepy period straight after lunch, make sure you have had plenty of sleep the night before. Most accidents happen when you have had less than 6 hours sleep. If

you have to drive for long periods of time, try to take a short power nap after lunch. A buddy system is a great idea and works well – share the driving and share keeping each other awake. Have a break every two hours, get out of the car and walk around for a few minutes. Don't rely on coffee, loud music, open windows or passengers to keep you awake. The best cure for drowsiness is sleep. If the warning signs are there, you should stop driving and take a break.

How long should a “power nap” be?

A short nap may refresh you enough to continue driving for another couple of hours. Pull over to a quiet spot, put the seat back and take a nap of about 15-20 minutes, no longer. After your nap get out of the car, walk around for 5 minutes and then drive on. Be aware of the signs of drowsiness and avoid the temptation to go just that little bit further.

Does caffeine help?

Caffeine does offer some short term help with alertness which may help for an hour or two. Sugar is not helpful and can make you sleepier after 30-90 minutes than if you had no sugar.

How many accidents are caused by drowsy drivers?

Road accident statistics show that at least one in six crashes are mainly the result of drivers not concentrating and paying attention to the road. Up to one in four accidents on country roads that involve only one car are due to the driver falling asleep. In Australia, the cost to the community of drowsy driving road accidents is estimated to be \$2 billion every year.

Where can I find out more information?

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/alert/tips-prevent-fall-asleep-crash>

This information is produced by:

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A voluntary group offering assistance and support to people and their families living with sleep disorders

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The peak national association of clinicians and scientists devoted to investigation of sleep and its disorders

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Ongoing concerns about sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your local doctor.

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