



## Get the Facts: Drowsy Driving

### In a Nutshell

Driving while sleepy can be a one-way ticket to a permanent rest. Don't do it!

### What do we mean by drowsy driving ?

We live in a 24/7 go-go-go society with costly effects on the safety, health and quality of life for the American public. Whether fatigue is caused by sleep restriction, long work shifts, distractions at home or staying out late having fun, many of us are tired. Whatever the cause, the results – and the consequences – are the same when we get behind the wheel. Tired, drowsy drivers have impaired cognition and performance leading to motor vehicle crashes and other health and safety issues.

### Why does it matter?

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that about 100,000 police-reported crashes annually involved drowsy drivers. These crashes typically lead to an estimated 50,000 people injured and nearly 1,000 deaths. While that number declined in 2020 as a result of reduced pandemic driving, the traffic safety, sleep science and public health communities say this is an underestimate of the impact of drowsy driving. Drowsiness/fatigue may play a role in crashes attributed to other causes. About one million crashes annually are thought to be produced by driver inattention/lapses. Sleep deprivation and fatigue increase the likelihood of such lapses of attention

*In 2020, 633 people lost their lives from drowsy driving-related crashes.*

*At highest risk: Young people (ages 18-29), especially males; shift workers and others whose sleep is disrupted by working at night or working long or irregular hours; those with untreated sleep disorders and those on the road between midnight and 6 a.m.*

### Play it safe!

- Watch for warning signs. If you can't remember the last few miles, drift from your lane, yawn repeatedly, suffer from the "head bob," drift out of your lane or make other driving errors, pull over for a rest.
- Get a good night's sleep. This may vary individually, but the average person requires about 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Find a road trip buddy. Passengers can watch for early warning signs of fatigue or switch drivers when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver.
- Schedule regular stops, every 100 miles or 2 hours.





- Avoid alcohol and medications (over the counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Alcohol interacts with fatigue increasing its effects – just like drinking on an empty stomach.
- Consult medical experts if you suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, often have difficulty sleeping at night and/or snore loudly every night.
- Don't count on tricks like loud music or open windows to keep you awake.
- Respond to symptoms of fatigue by finding a safe place to stop for a break.
- Grab a coffee or a functional energy drink to promote short-term alertness, if needed. But remember: It takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream.

**Sources:** National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
National Sleep Foundation

