

## DROWSY DRIVERS' ARE DANGEROUS

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates, "100,000 police reported automobile crashes are the direct result of driver fatigue each year. This results in an estimated 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses." A North Carolina study has found, "In 55% of fatigue related crashes, drivers were age 25 years or younger and were predominantly men." It is my hopes that this article will open our eyes to the dangers of driving while fatigued, please take the time to review the following information.

Before getting behind the wheel you should check to see if you are:  
Sleep deprived or fatigued (6 hours of sleep or less triples your risk)  
Suffering from sleep loss (insomnia)  
Driving long distances without proper rest breaks  
Driving through the night, midafternoon or when you would normally be asleep  
Working more than 60 hours a week (increases your risk by 40%)  
Working more than one job and your main job involves shift work  
Drinking even small amounts of alcohol  
Driving alone or on a long, rural, dark or boring road

Signs that should tell a driver to stop and rest:  
Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking or heavy eyelids  
Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts  
Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs  
Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes  
Trouble keeping your head up  
Drifting from your lane, tailgating or hitting a shoulder rumble strip  
Feeling restless and irritable

Things to plan on before hitting the road:  
Get a good nights sleep (usually 7 - 9 hours of sleep are recommended each night)  
Plan to drive long trips with a companion (Passengers can help look 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 (Alcohol interacts with fatigue, increasing its effects - just like drinking on an empty stomach.)  
Talk to your doctor if you suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night often, and/or snore loudly every night

If you become fatigued:

Find a safe place to stop as soon as possible and, when able, have a passenger take the wheel  
If you have no passenger with you take a 15 - 20 minute nap, more than 20 minutes can make you groggy for at least 15 minutes after awakening

Consume the equivalent of 2 cups of coffee. Remember that caffeine takes 30 minutes to enter the blood stream and will not greatly affect those who regularly consume it.

When you are taking medication, whether over the counter or prescribed, you need to read the label and know if it causes drowsiness. If the medication causes drowsiness, and you need to drive, you need to talk to your pharmacist or doctor. Sometimes the timing of when you take the medication can solve the problem. Many common cold and flu medications offer non-drowsy formulas that should be used if you plan on driving. If you are having symptoms of fatigue and have taken a medication you need to find a safe place to stop as soon as possible and, when able, have a companion take over. Due to the sedating ingredients in some medications, normal drowsy driving countermeasures may not be effective in overcoming the drowsiness that these medications cause.

Research for this article was obtained from the National Sleep Foundation. Their website can be viewed at [www.drowsydriving.org](http://www.drowsydriving.org) or [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).