



NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION

Drowsy Driving Prevention Week™

Drive Alert...Arrive Alive

www.DrowsyDriving.org

Facts About Drowsy Driving

(Teens/Young Drivers)

Getting Behind the Wheel: What Young Drivers Need to Know About Drowsy Driving

Becoming a driver is a monumental step in a person's life. Having a license and being able to drive means no longer relying on buses, bikes or parents to get around. But driving can be dangerous, especially for young people. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), car crashes are the number one killer of teens in the U.S.

Alcohol can be a factor in crashes involving young people, but sleepiness can be just as dangerous and possibly more common. With sleep deprivation reaching epidemic proportions among American teenagers and young adults, drowsiness can have a major impact on young drivers' safety behind the wheel.

Consider the facts:

- **Sleepiness is hazardous for young drivers.** Studies show more than half of all fall-asleep crashes involve drivers aged 25 years or younger.
- **Most young drivers are tired.** Biology, academic pressures, extracurricular activities and early school start times conspire to keep young people from getting enough sleep. Just one in five adolescents get an optimal nine hours of sleep on school nights; nearly one-half (45%) sleep less than eight hours on school nights – not enough for a teen's brain development.
- **Most young drivers drive drowsy.** According to NSF's 2006 Sleep in America poll, more than half of teens drove drowsy in the past year. In fact, 15% of drivers in 10th to 12th grades state they drove drowsy at least once a week. These are accidents waiting to happen.

Driving while Drowsy - What's the Harm?

Most people are aware of the dangers of driving while intoxicated, but many do not know that drowsiness also impairs judgment, performance and reaction times just like alcohol and drugs. Studies

show that being awake for more than 20 hours results in an impairment equal to a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08, the legal limit in all states.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conservatively estimates that 100,000 police-reported crashes each year are caused primarily by drowsy driving and that such crashes result in more than 1,550 deaths, 71,000 injuries and \$12.5 billion in monetary losses. While National Sleep Foundation surveys show Americans consistently report that they have driven drowsy, the problem is the greatest among young drivers. This brochure outlines the important facts about sleepiness behind the wheel and offers tips to help you drive alert and arrive alive.

Watch Out for Signs of Sleepiness

Most people are not very good at predicting when they are about to fall asleep. But there are key warning signs to tell you when you are too tired to drive, including:

- Trouble focusing, keeping your eyes open or your head up
- Yawning or rubbing your eyes repeatedly
- Daydreaming and wandering thoughts
- Slower reaction time, poor judgment
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating and missing signs or exits
- Turning up the radio or rolling down the window

These are signs that you may be at risk of falling asleep behind the wheel. If you experience any of these, pull over immediately at a safe place, switch drivers, take a short nap, consume caffeine or find a place to sleep for the night.

continued

Drowsy Driving – Who’s Most at Risk?

Anyone who drives is at risk of falling asleep at the wheel, but some groups of people are more at risk than others. They include:

- **Young drivers** – Combining inexperience with sleepiness and a tendency to drive at night puts young people at risk, especially males aged 16-25 years.
- **Shift workers and people working long hours** – People who work night shifts, rotating shifts, double shifts or work more than one job have a six-fold increase in drowsy driving crashes.
- **Commercial drivers** – Those who drive a high number of miles and drive at night are at significantly higher risk for fall-asleep crashes. Commercial drivers have also been found to be at a high risk for sleep disorders.
- **People with untreated sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)** – People with untreated OSA are up to seven times more likely to have a drowsy driving crash. For some people insomnia can increase fatigue.
- **Business travelers** – Frequent travelers who may be suffering from jet lag and crossing time zones, spending long hours behind the wheel or getting too little sleep.

Preventing a Fall-Asleep Crash

The best way to avoid a drowsy driving crash is to get adequate sleep on a regular basis, practice good sleep habits, and to seek treatment for sleep problems, should they arise. In addition, here are some important driving dos and don'ts:

DON'T

- Drive if you are tired or on medication that may cause drowsiness. (Check medication labels and speak to your doctor.)
- Rely on the radio, an open window or other tricks to keep you awake.
- Drive at times when you would normally be sleeping.
- Drink even a small amount of alcohol, especially if you are sleepy.

DO

- Get a good night's sleep before a long drive.
- Get off the road if you notice any of the warning signs of fatigue.
- Take a nap – find a safe place to take a 15 to 20-minute nap.
- Consume caffeine – the equivalent of 2 cups of coffee can increase alertness for several hours, but DO NOT rely on it for long periods.
- Try consuming caffeine before taking a short nap to get the benefits of both.
- Drive with a friend. A passenger who remains awake can help watch for signs of fatigue in the driver and can take a turn driving, if necessary.
- Always wear your seatbelt.

When we drive, we take responsibility for our own safety and the safety of others on the road with us. No trip is worth a life. Before you hit the road, keep these tips in mind so that you can drive alert and arrive alive.

Get Involved!

The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) sponsors Drowsy Driving Prevention Week™, an annual, national campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of driving while tired. You can help support our efforts by:

- **Becoming a member of NSF.** NSF offers memberships for individuals, organizations or sleep centers. Find out more online at www.sleepfoundation.org/joinus.
- **Becoming a Drowsy Driving Advocate.** Join our national network of advocates dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of sleep and the prevention of drowsy driving. Visit us online at www.DrowsyDriving.org to learn more.
- **Conducting your own drowsy driving initiative.** NSF offers a free online drowsy driving toolkit filled with information and resources to help you design your own awareness programs. NSF also hosts an online drowsy driving memorial page to pay tribute to loved ones who have been lost in sleep-related crashes. Visit www.DrowsyDriving.org to learn more.



NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION
Waking America to the Importance of Sleep®

www.sleepfoundation.org