

BACK TO BASICS: YOUR KEYS TO SAFE DRIVING



DRIVE SAFELY WORK WEEK: TUESDAY

STEER WITH A CLEAR HEAD

Most people are aware that they should never drink and drive. Alcohol impairs a driver's judgment, the ability to make quick decisions and overall driving performance. But did you know that driving while drowsy—whether due to lack of sleep, the effect of even a small amount of alcohol, or the use of prescription or over-the-counter medication—can also delay reaction time, decrease concentration and reduce judgment skills? Along with buckling up, being clear-headed is one of the most important fundamental contributors to getting to your destination safely.

“It is better to crash into a nap than to nap into a crash.”

— Author unknown

WAKE UP TO THE FACTS ON FATIGUED DRIVING

- According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, an estimated 17% of fatal vehicle crashes are linked to drowsy driving¹. However, unlike drugs and alcohol, there is no physical test to determine sleepiness as a potential cause of a crash, therefore, the frequency of drowsy driving crashes is most likely much higher.
- Our internal body clock tells us when we need to eat and sleep and when we have the most energy. Our body clocks run on a daily rhythm of 24 hours and there are periods of the day when we are likely to feel sleepy—mid-afternoon from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and early morning between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- Compared to drivers averaging 8 hours of sleep or more, drivers who sleep less than 5 hours per night on average are 6 times more likely to be involved in a fatigue-related crash.²
- In a recent national survey, 30% of employed U.S. adults (approximately 40.6 million workers) reported an average sleep duration of ≤ 6 hours per day.³ Particularly at risk of not getting enough sleep are those that work more than 40 hours per week and shift workers.⁴
- In a 2011 survey, nearly one-third of drivers admitted to driving in the past month when they were so tired that they had difficulty keeping their eyes open.⁵
- If you have been awake for more than 20 hours, you could be just as impaired as if you had a blood alcohol content of .08—the legal threshold of DUI across the U.S.⁶ This is especially relevant for shift workers or international travelers who have been awake for extended periods.
- A microsleep is an episode of sleep which may last for a fraction of a second or up to thirty seconds.⁷ If you are sleep-deprived, you can fall into a microsleep at any time, typically without warning.

¹ AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety; 2010, <http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/2010drowsydrivingreport.pdf>

² Stutts, J. C., Wilkins, J.W., Osberg, J. S., Vaughn, B.V. (2003) Driver risk factors for sleep-related crashes. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*

³ CDC analysis of data from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), Apr. 2012

⁴ Centers for Disease Control <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6116a2.htm>

⁵ The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's 2011 safety culture survey

⁶ National Sleep Foundation, 2009

⁷ International Classification of Sleep Disorders Diagnostic and Coding Manual



GOT TEENS?

It is hard enough to be an inexperienced driver when all of your senses and reflexes are at 100%. It is particularly challenging—and dangerous—for new drivers who are impaired in any way. As parents, you can play a big role in helping your young driver stay safe.

- Teens with involved, supportive parents are 71% less likely to drive while intoxicated.⁸ Be available to pick up your teen with no questions asked at the time, if he/she has been drinking or if his/her driver is impaired in any way.
- Parents need to ensure their teens are getting enough sleep, because drivers age 16-24 are nearly twice as likely to be involved in a drowsy driving crash as drivers age 40-59.⁹
- Remember that teens need more sleep than adults—8.5 hours is the minimum recommended by experts.
- Teens are typically leaving school to go home or to after-school activities in the mid-day timeframe when many people feel sleepy—2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Talk to your teen about recognizing the signs of drowsiness before they get behind the wheel.
- To help ensure quality sleep, experts recommend cutting out screen time (including TV, video games and Internet access) within two hours of bedtime.
- Everybody responds differently to the intake of caffeine. Coffee and energy drinks are popular with teens but should not be consumed any time from 4 to 8 hours before bedtime, depending on the individual.
- Be a good role model. Let your teen know that practicing good sleep habits and never driving impaired in any way, is a priority for you.

For more information on drowsy driving, visit the National Sleep Foundation's website at: www.sleepfoundation.org.

SYMPTOMS OF DROWSY DRIVING

- Having trouble keeping your eyes open and focused;
- The inability to keep your head up;
- Daydreaming or having wandering, disconnected thoughts;
- Drifting from your lane or off the road, or tailgating;
- Yawning frequently or rubbing your eyes repeatedly;
- Missing signs or driving past your intended exit;
- Feeling irritable and restless; and
- Being unable to remember how far you have traveled or what you have recently passed.

MEDICATIONS AND DRIVING

- Antihistamines and other over-the-counter and prescription allergy medications can cause drowsiness, slow reaction time and impair coordination.
- Common prescription drugs (including medications for depression, high blood pressure, pain, diabetes, cholesterol, ulcers, anxiety disorders and insomnia) can often cause drowsiness. They also can affect vision and other skills that are needed to be a focused driver.
- Over-the-counter drugs such as cold and cough medicines, drugs to prevent nausea or motion sickness, pain relievers, decongestants and diuretics can cause drowsiness or dizziness.

TIPS FOR KEEPING A CLEAR HEAD

Designate a driver. If you plan to drink alcohol, designate your sober driver before you leave home. Consider ways to reward them by picking up the tab for their food, paying for parking or covering their choice of non-alcohol beverages.

Under the weather? If you are taking medications due to illness or allergies and must drive, read the labels of all medications and check with your doctor or pharmacist to see if there could be any dangerous interactions or side effects from your other medications. Be particularly careful when taking medications for the first time—whether over-the-counter or prescription—since you do not know how you might react.

Tune into your internal body clock. Know what times of day you are most alert and when you're most likely to be drowsy.

Take a break. Experts recommend taking a break to stretch every two hours. This is also a great time to check messages and return calls if necessary.

Team up. Avoid driving alone for long distances. A passenger who remains awake for the journey can take a turn behind the wheel and help identify the warning signs of fatigue.

Beware of jet lag. If you are arriving after a long flight, particularly if you have crossed time zones, arrange for someone to pick you up at the airport. Also consider using a taxi, car service, shuttle or public transportation for at least the first 24 hours until your body has had time to adjust and feel well-rested.

Fuel up. Glucose is the main source of energy for the brain. But when fueling your mind for your best performance behind the wheel, instead of a quick snack of sugary sweets or drinks that give you a temporary boost, be prepared with low-glycemic snacks when you travel. Snacks such as nuts, apples, or yogurt will help keep your blood glucose steady and provide energy for optimum brain performance.

Get your ZZZs. Get at least 7–8 hours of sleep the night before a road trip and travel at times when you are normally awake. Stop overnight rather than driving straight through.

⁸ The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Research Institute

⁹ AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety Study, 2011