

Driver Fatigue

Teens typically need a little more than 9 hours of nightly sleep to feel alert and well rested during the day. However, sleep deprivation is very common among teens. As a result, teens—and especially young men—have a high risk of drowsy driving. While precise counts of crashes caused by driver fatigue are not yet possible, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety recently estimated that 7% of all crashes and 16.5% of fatal crashes involved fatigue, which means more than 5,000 deaths each year. The Institute of Medicine estimated that drowsy driving may be a factor in 20% of all serious motor vehicle crash injuries. Drowsy driving is just as dangerous as drunk or distracted driving and affects teens greatly.

Sleepiness Impairs Your Performance Just Like Alcohol and Drugs

Studies show that being awake for 18 hours produces impairment equal to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05% and 0.10%—more than legally drunk—after 24 hours of being awake.

Warning Signs of Sleepiness or Fatigue

- Turning up the radio or rolling down the window
- Impaired reaction time and judgment
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- Trouble focusing, keeping your eyes open or your head up
- Daydreaming and wandering thoughts
- Yawning or rubbing your eyes repeatedly
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating and missing signs or exits
- Feeling restless, irritable or aggressive

Are You at Risk?

Special at-risk groups for drowsy driving include young people, shift workers, and people with undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders. However, any driver can experience fatigue at one time or another. Your risk for fatigue increases if you are:

- Got less than 6 hours of sleep
- Typically get less sleep than you need
- Driving long distances without proper rest breaks
- Driving through the night or mid-afternoon
- Working more than 60 hours a week
- Drinking alcohol
- Driving alone or on a long, rural, dark, or boring road
- Taking sedating medications

Before a Trip Do the Following:

- Get adequate sleep—most teens need 9-10 hours to maintain proper alertness during the day
- Schedule proper breaks—about every 100 miles or 2 hours during long trips
- Arrange for a travel companion—someone to talk with and share the driving
- Avoid alcohol and sedating medications—check your labels or ask your doctor



Countermeasures to Prevent a Fall-Asleep Crash While Driving

- Watch for the warning signs of fatigue—see above
- Stop driving—pull off at the next exit, rest area or find a place to sleep for the night
- 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
- Try consuming caffeine before taking a short nap to get the benefits of both