



Fight Drowsy Driving

Drowsy drivers are a major danger on the road. More than 100,000 motor vehicle crashes each year are a result of drowsy driving, according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates.

Because of their work schedules, shiftworkers are at a significant risk for drowsy driving incidents. Studies from the National Sleep Foundation indicate that about one-quarter of shiftworkers reported having had a traffic accident or close call in the last year.

Driving while fatigued is as problem for a number of reasons. According to Washington-based NSF, drowsiness has a number of physical side effects that can impair driving, including tunnel vision, shortened attention span and reduced reaction times. Drowsy drivers can't process information as quickly or as accurately as an alert one. This makes it much more difficult for a drowsy driver to become aware of a potential accident and react safely to it.

Facts and Fiction about Sleep

Many people have misconceptions about sleep, which NSF dispels:

Caffeine can overcome drowsiness while driving.

Only sleep can truly overcome drowsiness. Caffeine may make you feel more alert, but the results are temporary. People who take stimulants while severely sleep-deprived are likely to have "micro sleeps," which are essentially four- to five-second naps. A vehicle traveling at 55 mph can cover more than 100 yards in four to five seconds – plenty of time for an accident.

I'm a safe driver so it doesn't matter if I am sleepy.

The only safe driver is an alert one. When fatigued, even the best drivers become confused and use poor judgment.

I can't take naps.

Despite the fact that many people insist they cannot nap, sleep-deprived individuals usually can do so easily if they give themselves the chance. Even if you think you can't nap, pull over and recline for 15 minutes – it is likely you will be able to fall asleep. Always be sure to do so safely, in busy areas with your car doors locked.

I can tell when I am going to fall asleep.

While most people believe they can control and predict when they are about to fall asleep, they cannot. A drowsy person can fall asleep without even being aware of it. People are also unable to tell how long they have been asleep. It only takes a few seconds of sleep on the road to cause a major accident.

When Drowsiness Strikes

Under no circumstances should you drive while drowsy. Turning up the radio, rolling down the windows, getting out of the car and running, or slapping yourself are not effective means of waking yourself up. The only remedy for drowsiness is sleep.

If you find yourself becoming sleepy while behind the wheel – other signs include drifting in and out of your lane or driving over rumble strips – you should pull over immediately. Options for getting home safely include taking a nap on the side of the road until you are rested enough to drive, calling a friend or family member to come pick you up, or taking a cab or public transportation home. Drowsy driving



accidents most often occur when a driver is alone in the vehicle. Carpooling provides someone who can alert the driver of danger and take over behind the wheel if necessary.

You also can take measures to prevent drowsiness from striking. The average person requires anywhere from seven to nine hours of sleep each night. It is best if you can keep a regular sleep schedule and stick to it.

Shiftworkers may have more difficulty maintaining a regular sleep schedule. If you are required to sleep in the daytime hours, be sure you keep your room dark or wear a sleep mask to block out the light. Block out outside sounds by wearing earplugs or creating "white noise" with a fan. Good, uninterrupted sleep is essential for safety on the job and on the road.

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