



# HAVE YOU EVER DRIVEN WHILE DROWSY?

Many people drive while they are drowsy. Some are able to recognise that there is a problem, but most are unaware that their driving is being affected.



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# Sleepiness & Driving

## Facts and Tips



## SLEEPY DRIVING

Sleepy drivers start yawning, their eyes go out of focus and they cannot remember driving the last few kilometres. A survey in the US found that as many as six in ten drivers drive while they are drowsy. The problem is that people are very bad at knowing whether it is affecting their driving and whether they are too drowsy to drive. Falling asleep happens quickly and without much warning.

## HOW DOES SLEEPINESS AFFECT YOUR DRIVING?

If you drive after 17 hours without sleep, your performance is as bad as driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.05% (the equivalent of two standard drinks in the first hour for males and one standard drink for females). Getting up at 7am in the morning, staying awake during the day, going out in the evening and driving home at midnight gets you to this level.

24 hours without sleep is as dangerous as driving with a blood alcohol level of 0.10% which makes it ten times more likely that a crash will occur.

## WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Statistics show that more than half of the drowsy driving accidents involve people 25 years or younger. Shiftworkers are also at high risk, as are long distance truck drivers. People with sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea and narcolepsy have a much higher risk of having an accident due to their sleepiness.

## WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

Usually there are warning signs indicating that there is a high risk that an accident will occur:

- Sleepiness
- Eyes closing or going out of focus
- Trouble keeping the head up
- Cannot stop yawning
- Wandering thoughts, difficulty concentrating on driving
- Cannot remember driving the past few kilometres
- Drifting between lanes, off the road or missing signs
- Very heavy eyelids
- Slow blinking

## HOW TO PREVENT DROWSY DRIVING?

Most accidents happen when you have had less than six hours sleep.

If you need to drive a long distance, particularly at night or during the sleepy period straight after lunch, make sure you have had plenty of sleep the night before.

If you have to drive for long periods of time, try to take a short power nap after lunch. Share the driving where possible, have a break every two hours, get out of the car and walk around for a few minutes. Do not rely on coffee, loud music, open windows or passengers to keep you awake. The best cure for drowsiness is sleep. If the warning signs are there, stop driving and take a break.

## HOW LONG SHOULD A "POWER NAP" BE?

A short nap may refresh you enough to continue driving for another couple of hours. Pull over to a quiet spot, put the seat back and take a nap of about 15 - 20 minutes, no longer. After your nap, get out of the car, walk around for five minutes and then drive on. Be aware of the signs of drowsiness and avoid the temptation to go just that little bit further.

## DOES CAFFEINE OR SUGAR HELP?

Caffeine does offer some short term help with alertness which may assist for an hour or two. Take the coffee or tea before your nap so by the time you have completed your 15 minute nap, the caffeine will be in your body system.

Sugar is not helpful. After 30 - 90 minutes it can make you sleepier than if you had no sugar.

## HOW MANY ACCIDENTS ARE CAUSED BY DROWSY DRIVERS?

Road accident statistics show that at least one in six crashes are mainly the result of drivers not concentrating and paying attention to the road. Up to one in four accidents on country roads that involve only one car are due to the driver falling asleep.

In Australia, drowsy driving road accidents are estimated to cost the community \$2 billion every year.

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