



As the holiday season approaches, many people's schedules will be filled with extra events that might change their normal sleep schedule. This change, along with other factors, could result in driving while tired or drowsy. A key finding in a study lead by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that 1 in 6 fatal crashes involved a tired or drowsy driver. When someone gets behind the wheel without enough sleep, they can become confused, use poor judgment, and put themselves at greater risk of getting into an accident. A drowsy driver scans the road less, nods off at the wheel, and has slower reaction times.

Below are symptoms a drowsy driver may experience:

- Daydreaming, disconnected thoughts
- Yawning, can't keep head up
- Frequent blinking, heavy eyelids, rubbing eyes
- No memory of the last few miles
- Difficulty focusing on the road
- Drifting from lane to lane, tailgating, or grazing the shoulder of the road or rumble strip
- Missing exits and street signs (a major telltale sign of fatigue and drowsiness)

Ways to avoid driving drowsy

- **Get a full eight hours of sleep.** One common misconception is that as long as an individual gets some sleep, they will not suffer from fatigue. The NSF has found that most people who don't get the recommended hours of sleep are twice as likely to drive drowsy as those who do.
- **Schedule driving breaks.** Plan to stop every 100 miles or two hours to take a stretch break and freshen up. Drivers feeling drowsy at this point might consider taking a 10-to-20-minute power nap during the stop.
- **Caffeinate.** Caffeine can increase alertness in the short term, but it's not a substitute for sleep.
- **Eat lightly.** More frequent, smaller meals are less likely to cause drowsiness than one large one.
- **Drink fluids.** The body can become drowsy when a driver is dehydrated.

This month's Safety Alert shares a quiz to see if you understand the dangers of drowsy driving.

"Drowsy Driving Quiz." *FMCSA*, www.fmcsa.dot.gov/driver-safety/sleep-apnea/drowsy-driving-quiz.
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