

# DANGERS OF *drowsy driving*

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The American Academy  
*of Sleep Medicine*  
[www.aasmnet.org](http://www.aasmnet.org)

# WHAT IS DROWSY *driving?*

It occurs when drivers are too tired to remain alert and focused behind the wheel. Drivers can fall asleep and lose control of the vehicle.

## **HOW COMMON IS DROWSY DRIVING?**

There are no exact numbers on how many people drive drowsy. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates at least 100,000 crashes a year result from tired drivers. However, driver sleepiness is difficult to determine in many accidents.



# LEARN ABOUT WHO IS AT RISK FOR DROWSY DRIVING

There is no currently accepted way to measure if you or someone else is too tired to drive. However, there are some groups that are more at risk for drowsy driving.

**SHIFT WORKERS OR BUSINESS TRAVELERS:** Your body wants to sleep when it is dark and be awake when it is light. Shift workers and business travelers may have different sleep schedules than their bodies want, which can cause them to wake up frequently during sleep and feel unrefreshed after sleeping.

**PEOPLE WHO ARE SLEEP DEPRIVED:** If you feel that you often do not get enough sleep and routinely find yourself falling asleep during the day, you may be sleep deprived. Just like you're more likely to fall asleep while doing your daily activities, you may have trouble staying awake behind the wheel.

**PEOPLE WHO HAVE STAYED UP LONGER THAN USUAL:** Whether you have been driving for hours or just stayed up all night, you are more likely to have problems with reacting in time and staying awake.

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*Studies show that drowsy driving can be as dangerous as drinking and driving.*

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**PEOPLE WHO HAVE CONSUMED**

**ALCOHOL:** Drinking alcohol negatively affects driving. Sleep deprivation negatively affects driving. Combining the two makes the risk of accidents even worse.

**PEOPLE ON CERTAIN MEDICATIONS:**

Some pain medications, antidepressants, cold or cough medicines, and other medications can cause sleepiness. Ask your physician if any of your prescribed or over-the-counter medications can cause drowsiness.

**PEOPLE WITH UNDIAGNOSED**

**SLEEP DISORDERS:** Sleep disorders may be preventing you from falling asleep or getting good quality sleep during the night.



## **HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM AT RISK FOR DROWSY DRIVING?**

There is no easy test to determine if you are a danger to yourself or others. Studies have shown that people often can't judge how tired they are. Most incidents happen between midnight and 6 a.m. Signs to watch out for are listed below.

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### ***Signs of Drowsy Driving***

- Yawning constantly
  - Ending up too close to the next car
  - Missing road signs or driving past turns
  - Drifting out of the lane
  - Heavy eyelids
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## HOW DO I PREVENT DROWSY DRIVING?

The best step to prevent drowsy driving is to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night.

***If you think you may be too tired to drive, here are some things you can do:***

- Get a ride from someone else
- Take public transportation or a taxi
- Pull over to a safe place and take a nap in your car
- Drive with someone

## WHAT IF I CAN'T GET ENOUGH SLEEP OR AM STILL TIRED AFTER SLEEPING ALL NIGHT?

If you find that you are unable to sleep 7-8 hours a night or are still tired after getting that much sleep, you may have a sleep disorder.

***Disorders that might cause you to be tired during the day include:***

- Obstructive Sleep Apnea
- Narcolepsy
- Insomnia

The good news is that there are many effective treatments for sleep disorders.

## WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF DROWSY DRIVING?

You could get into an accident that could damage your or someone else's property. You could injure yourself or others. Serious accidents can lead to death. In some states, people have gone to jail for their role in drowsy driving accidents. Many people never realize that they are putting themselves and others at risk by driving while impaired by sleepiness.

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***Drowsy driving has serious consequences, like death and jail time.***

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Fortunately, drowsy driving is preventable. Knowing the signs and risk factors for drowsy driving will help you recognize when someone shouldn't be driving. Getting enough sleep is the best way to prevent drowsy driving.

**If you have trouble sleeping or think that you may have a sleep disorder, please see your health care provider.**

For more information, see [www.sleepcentral.org](http://www.sleepcentral.org)

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