

# DRIVER FATIGUE

## Information Fact Sheet

Fatigue is a major killer on our roads and a factor in 20% of fatal crashes. Understanding the warning signs and how you can avoid fatigue reduces your risk of becoming another statistic.

### HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M TOO TIRED TO MAKE A TRIP?

**You probably won't know - that's the problem.**

A recent study by the Centre for Sleep Research in South Australia revealed that if you've been awake for 17 hours then drive, the risk of crashing is as great as being at the 0.05 legal drinking limit.

Driving after 24 hours without sleep gives you the same risk as someone with a blood alcohol level of 0.1.

Don't drive long distances after a day's work. You're already tired before you start. It's better to drive a short distance and stop for the night.

Likewise, be warned about the early start to beat the traffic. You may be tired before you start as your internal body clock is telling you that you should be asleep.

### WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF FATIGUE?

Get to know the warnings signs. Don't try to fight fatigue.

**You shouldn't be behind the wheel if you're experiencing:**

- Minor aches and pains, light headache, tired eyes.
- Light boredom or fidgeting.
- Drifting of attention, tenseness, nervousness.
- Occasional yawning, drowsiness, nodding off.
- Difficulty concentrating, missing traffic signs.

### WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO STAY ALERT?

You should never try to fight fatigue. But there are some precautions you can take to avoid distractions and boredom at the wheel between breaks.

**Keep fresh air circulating through the car**

A stuffy environment can make you drowsy.

**Share the driving**

Even a short break in the passenger seat can revive you for another stint. Passengers can also talk to the driver and encourage them to take breaks.

### **Eat light, fresh foods**

Sandwiches and fruit are ideal snacks for drivers. Avoid heavy, fatty foods which hasten the onset of tiredness and don't be tempted to have alcohol. Beware of too much chocolate as it increases the blood sugar level in the short term but once it disperses it can also speed up the onset of tiredness.

### **Keep children amused**

Nothing is more tiring or distracting than bored children squabbling in the back seat.

**Remember, the only cure for fatigue is sleep.**

## **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TAKE BREAKS FROM DRIVING?**

Take regular breaks on long journeys. A five-minute petrol break every couple of hours isn't enough. Plan to stop for at least 15 minutes every two hours. Get out and stretch your legs. Driver reviver areas are ideal rest stops during holiday periods.

## **WHAT IS SLEEP APNEA?**

Sleep apnea is the medical name for interruptions in breathing during sleep. It's most common in people who are overweight and potentially life threatening.

People with untreated sleep apnea are prone to nodding off during the day. This increases their risk of falling asleep at the wheel.

### **Symptoms include:**

- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- Memory problems.
- Irritability.
- Impotence.
- Personality change.
- Lapses in concentration.

Sleep apnea can be treated with surgery, nasal sprays and other devices. Weight and alcohol reduction also help.

**For further information please refer to our Sleep Disorders fact sheet, phone Sleep Disorders Australia on: (02) 99903514 or speak to your doctor.**

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