



5 Minute
Safety
Talk

FATIGUE AT WORK

EMPLOYER TOOLKIT



Drowsy Driving Is Impaired Driving

Drowsy driving describes feelings of tiredness or reduced alertness while driving. Many researchers compared drunk driving to drowsy driving. Losing even two hours of sleep from a normal 8-hour sleep schedule can have similar effects to having three beers. Driving on 4 to 5 hours of sleep makes you four times more likely to crash, the same crash risk as driving with a .08 blood alcohol level. So it's important to know that drowsy driving is impaired driving. We need to understand the factors that lead to drowsy driving and what we can do to stay safe behind the wheel.

SIGNS OF DROWSY DRIVING

Drowsiness makes you slower to react, makes it harder to pay attention, and makes it tough to stay focused on the road and what's going on around you. If you are struggling to stay attentive, frequently blinking, yawning or rubbing your eyes, this may signal that you are drowsy and possibly driving impaired.

Tired drivers make riskier decisions, are less vigilant, and have slower reaction times than alert drivers. When you're drowsy, you can misjudge how far you are from another vehicle, miss a stop sign, or drift off the road.

Have you had the experience of your head bobbing and eyes closing for just a few seconds, then you snap awake? That's called a microsleep, and it can be very dangerous while driving. In just 3 seconds at 55 miles an hour, your car travels about 80 yards, almost the length of a football field. During a microsleep, you could easily drift out of your lane and into oncoming traffic, hit another car or drive off the road.

CAUSE OF DROWSY DRIVING: SLEEP LOSS

One of the main causes of drowsy driving is not getting enough sleep. There are a number of reasons why people don't get the optimal 7 to 9 hours of sleep:

- They may be working irregular schedules or shifts that make it difficult to get enough sleep
- They may have been drinking alcohol or caffeine too close to bedtime
- They may have insomnia, the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep
- They may have obstructive sleep apnea, with symptoms of loud snoring, gasping for breath or stopping breathing while sleeping
- Or they may not be prioritizing sleep

If any of these issues are causing you to get less than 7 hours of sleep every day, make some changes in your schedule and habits. If your problems can't easily be solved yourself, talk to your doctor. Getting restful sleep is important for your health and safety.

CAUSE OF DROWSY DRIVING: YOUR BODY CLOCK

People are biologically programmed to sleep when it's dark outside and be active during daylight hours. Your body secretes a hormone called melatonin at night, which promotes sleep. This is called the circadian rhythm, or your body clock.

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Work schedules do not always coordinate with this natural timing of waking and sleep. You may work nights or early morning shifts, or rotate shifts so your sleep schedule is often changing. You may have a second job that makes your workday very long.

Crash risk increases between midnight and 6 a.m. because the body clock is programmed to sleep, so be very cautious when driving during these hours. Avoid driving if you have been awake for 16 consecutive hours, as fatigue sets in at this point. Being awake for 20 consecutive hours is the equivalent of being legally drunk.

Most of all, if you are exhibiting signs of drowsy driving, immediately pull over and park. Your safety is always the top priority.