



The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) announces November 6-13 as Drowsy Driving Prevention Week® for 2022.

Drowsy Driving Prevention Week® is a time to reflect on how dangerously common, but preventable drowsy driving truly is. Drowsy driving can be avoided. The most important preventative measure to stopping drowsy driving is a well-rested driver.

Operating a motor vehicle when sleepy is known as drowsy driving, and it can affect anyone who gets behind the wheel. Drowsy driving significantly increases the risk of accidents, leading to a troubling number of injuries and deaths every year.

How Common Is Drowsy Driving?

While there is no exact measure of drowsy driving, research indicates that it is disturbingly common. Survey data from the CDC indicated that one in every 25 adults had fallen asleep behind the wheel in the past month.

What Are the Dangers of Drowsy Driving?

Drowsy driving is a major contributor to motor vehicle collisions. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2017 drowsy driving led to at least 91,000 crashes, resulting in roughly 50,000 injuries and 800 deaths.

This data likely underestimates the impact of drowsy driving because it's often impossible to definitively determine whether drowsy driving caused an accident, especially after fatal crashes.

In light of this, other studies calculate that drowsy driving causes up to 6,000 deadly crashes every year. Researchers estimate that around 21% of fatal car crashes involve a person driving while drowsy.

Why Is Drowsy Driving Dangerous?

Drowsy driving significantly increases the risk of car accidents. Microsleeps are when a person dozes off for just a few seconds, and when they occur while driving, it's easy for the car to run off the road or collide with another vehicle.

Drowsy driving is dangerous even if a person doesn't actually fall asleep. Research shows that sleep deprivation leads to mental impairment that is similar to drunkenness with 24 hours of sleep deprivation roughly equating to a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 0.10%.

This impairment makes a person less attentive to their surroundings and more easily distracted. It slows their reaction time, making it harder to avoid dangers in the roadway. Insufficient sleep is also tied to worsened decision-making, which can lead to risk-taking behind the wheel.

What Causes Drowsy Driving?

Multiple factors can play a role in drowsy driving:

- Sleep deprivation: Lack of sleep is a leading cause of excessive daytime sleepiness, which can induce microsleeps or other dangerous driving behavior. Adults should get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep each night, but a significant number of adults routinely fail to get this recommended amount of sleep.
- Sleep disorders: Many sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea, cause a person's sleep to be restricted, interrupted, and less restorative. Many sleep disorders go undiagnosed and, when left untreated, can cause daytime drowsiness.
- Alcohol: Drinking alcohol can prompt sleepiness while also affecting reaction time and decision-making in ways that increase the risks of auto accidents.
- Medications: Numerous medications cause sleepiness. Sleep aids, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and dietary supplements, that are taken at night may cause lingering grogginess the next morning. Drowsiness is also a side effect of medications used for many other conditions.
- Time of day: Auto accidents from drowsy driving occur most frequently between midnight and six a.m. or in the mid-afternoon, which are two times when sleepiness peaks.

NSF encourages everyone to prioritize sleep and drive when alert and refreshed.



Monthly Toolbox Talk

No one knows the exact moment when sleep comes over their body. Falling asleep at the wheel is clearly dangerous but being sleepy affects your ability to drive safely even if you don't fall asleep. Drowsiness:

- Makes you less able to pay attention to the road.
- Slows reaction time if you must brake or steer suddenly.
- Affects your ability to make good decisions.

If you have any of these warning signs, pull over to rest or change drivers. Simply turning up the radio or opening the window are not effective ways to keep you alert. For more warning signs, visit [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#).

Who's more likely to drive drowsy?

- Drivers who do not get enough sleep.
- Commercial drivers who operate vehicles such as tow trucks, tractor trailers, and buses.
- Shift workers who are people that work the night shift or long shifts.
- Drivers with untreated sleep disorders such as sleep apnea, where breathing repeatedly stops and starts.
- Drivers who use medications that make them sleepy.

Learn the warning signs of drowsy driving:

- Yawning or blinking frequently.
- Difficulty remembering the past few miles driven.
- Missing your exit.
- Drifting from your lane.
- Hitting a rumble strip on the side of the road.

Prevent drowsy driving before taking the wheel

- Get enough sleep! Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep a day, while teens need at least 8 hours.
- Develop good sleeping habits, such as sticking to a sleep schedule.
- If you have a sleep disorder or have symptoms of a sleep disorder such as snoring or feeling sleepy during the day, talk to your doctor about treatment options.
- Avoid drinking alcohol or taking medications that make you sleepy. Be sure to check the label on any medications or talk to your pharmacist.

