

Combat Drowsy Driving

Many of us think we can keep our minds alert, even when we're feeling the tug of sleepiness on our brain and bodies. But the truth is that sleep is a powerful biological drive—one that can overtake even the best driver. Rolling down the windows and turning up the radio volume—these tricks don't work. It's important to know what to look for and how to handle drowsiness to protect the safety of everyone on the road.

It's not always easy to tell when you're too tired to drive. Here are some signs that it's time to pull over:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable

Well before a person actually falls asleep while driving, lapses in attention and slowed reaction times make drowsy driving very dangerous. Driving is a complex activity that involves many small but important split decisions with every passing second. Even if you're awake, your brain is not functioning optimally to handle these decisions. Studies show that excessive sleepiness decreases our judgment and increases risk taking.

The best way to make sure your mind and body are in optimal driving shape is to plan ahead and get 7-8 hours of sleep before your drive. Other methods include:

- The pre-drive nap: taking a short nap before a road trip can help make up for a short night's sleep.
- The mid-drive nap: if you find yourself drowsy while driving, pull over to take a short nap of 20 minutes. Make sure you are in a safe location and remember you'll be groggy for 15 minutes or so after waking up.
- The Buddy system: It's safest to drive with a partner on long trips. Pull over every two hours and switch drivers, while the other takes a nap if possible.
- Don't rush. Better to arrive at your destination safe than on time.
- Do not drink alcohol. Even very small amounts of alcohol will enhance drowsiness.
- Don't drive between midnight and 6 a.m. Because of your body's biological rhythm, this is a time when sleepiness is most intense.
- Drink caffeine: caffeine improves alertness, although be aware that the effects of caffeine will wear off after several hours.

source: National Sleep Foundation, <http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-news/how-stay-awake-the-road-tips-combat-drowsy-driving>

Education and Training

The Saskatchewan Safety Council offers various training and education related to safe driving. Visit www.sasksafety.org or call 306.757.3197 to find out more.

Safety Talk Discussion

Be Accountable: Choose safety - work safe - and go home injury free!