

# SLEEP AND TRUCK DRIVING SAFETY

## **i** Quick Facts:

Sleep is important for overall health and optimal performance, and healthy sleep is essential for driving safety. Adults should sleep 7 or more hours daily for maximum alertness. Insufficient sleep and untreated sleep disorders increase the risk of drowsy driving. Common sleep problems that can increase sleepiness include obstructive sleep apnea, insomnia and shift work.

## KEY POINTS:

- **Truck driving is a demanding job, and poor sleep increases your risk of drowsy driving.**
- **It is estimated that more than 20% of fatal motor vehicle accidents are caused by drowsy driving.**
- **Timing matters! Shift work can require you to be awake at a time when your body typically sleeps. Most accidents on the road occur between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.**
- **The effect of drowsiness on driving ability is like the effect of alcohol.**



## **?** How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit [www.sleepeducation.org](http://www.sleepeducation.org)

## **!** Am I At Risk:

Not getting enough sleep - even for one day - is a significant risk factor for drowsy driving. Adults who are under the age of 40 years have a higher risk of being involved in a drowsy driving accident. The risk of drowsy driving also is higher among men than women. Shift work, some medications and sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea increase your risk of drowsy driving. Excess body weight is the major risk factor for sleep apnea. Warning signs for sleep apnea include snoring, gasping or choking, and silent breathing pauses during sleep.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Drowsiness behind the wheel is a serious hazard on our roadways. Being drowsy can impair driving in the same way as being drunk. When drowsy, you may have trouble:

- **Paying attention**
- **Responding to road and traffic conditions**
- **Making quick decisions**
- **Staying awake**

Signs of drowsiness behind the wheel include yawning, head bobbing and heavy eyelids. You also may miss your exit, drift out of your lane, or fall asleep at a stop. Don't ignore near misses! Drowsy driving accidents are usually destructive. Many drowsy drivers run off the road. It is also common for drowsy drivers to drift into oncoming traffic. These accidents tend to occur at high speeds. Too often, drowsy driving accidents result in death.

## TIPS

Make it a top priority to avoid driving while drowsy:

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule and daily routine.
- Sleep 7 hours or more daily.
- Avoid driving during a time of day when you normally sleep.
- Avoid driving after getting fewer than 6 hours of sleep.
- Avoid driving after taking any medication that causes sleepiness.

If you become sleepy while driving, you should:

- Pull off the road to a safe location.
- Take a brief nap lasting 10-20 minutes.
- Avoid longer naps, which can cause you to feel groggy.
- Use caffeine, which can give your alertness a brief boost.
- Avoid frequent use of caffeine, which will reduce its effect.

## A DEADLY EXAMPLE

A semitractor-trailer failed to slow with traffic while entering a marked highway work zone near Chattanooga, Tennessee. The truck hit the rear of a car at an estimated speed of 78-82 mph. The impact started a crash sequence

that involved seven other vehicles and 18 people. A post-crash fire consumed one of the cars. Six people died because of this crash. At the time of the crash, the driver had been working for about 14.5 hours. An investigation revealed that the truck driver did not take rest breaks as required by hours-of-service regulations. His performance errors were likely the result of fatigue caused by severe sleep restriction.

*(Photo Page 1) A semitractor-trailer following a deadly collision caused by drowsy driving. (Photo Below) Post-crash image of one of the destroyed cars.*

Source: National Transportation Safety Board



### ➔ Next Steps:

- Make it a priority to sleep 7 hours or more daily.
- Refuse to drive when you feel drowsy.
- Pull off the road to a safe location if you feel sleepy behind the wheel.
- Talk to your doctor about any ongoing sleep problems.

### Questions For Your Physician



Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

### Sample Questions:



Why do I feel tired all the time?

Why do I wake up so early in the morning?

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