

Best Practice Guide

Fatigue



Open Your Eyes To Fatigue

Driver fatigue refers to driving while tired, sleepy or drowsy.

Drivers who are fatigued are likely to have slower reaction times, reduced vigilance and difficulty processing information. In extreme cases fatigue can cause a driver to fall into a 'micro sleep' where they lose consciousness for several seconds, or to completely fall asleep at the wheel.

There are several steps you can take to avoid driving while fatigued and identify the warning signs of becoming tired behind the wheel.

Get Your Sleep

The amount of sleep a person needs each night varies, but on average, most adults need between 7 and 8 hours. You should be able to tell whether you are getting the right amount of sleep by how you feel during the day. If you feel drowsy you probably haven't had enough sleep.



Avoid 'Tired' Hours

Avoid driving at times when you would usually be asleep. If possible you should also avoid driving during peak times of sleepiness - the early hours of the morning and during the afternoon 'dip' of 2 - 4pm.

Consider Your Lifestyle

If you feel sleepy during the day you should consider whether your lifestyle is contributing to your tiredness.

You should consider factors such as:

- Shift working.
- Family responsibilities, such as a new baby.
- Socialising in the evening.
- Medication.
- Stress.

By examining what is making you feel tired you may be able to take action to cut out or reduce the impact of these factors. Consult your GP if necessary.

Look For The Warning Signs

Tiredness does not occur suddenly, but creeps up on us gradually with a number of warning signs. It is vital that you look out for these warning signs and take notice of your body. If it is telling you that you are tired, then you **MUST NOT DRIVE**.

Warning signs of driving while tired include:

- Difficulty concentrating.
- Yawning.
- Trouble keeping your eyes open.
- Neck muscles relaxing, causing your head to droop.
- Difficulty remembering driving the last few miles.
- Frequent blinking.
- Varying speed for no reason.
- Drifting over lane markings.

Take Regular Breaks

Always plan your journey to incorporate a 15 minute break for every 2 hours of driving. Try to plan ahead so that you have an idea of rest locations where it is safe to park up and get out of your vehicle for fresh air.



Take Action When You Feel Sleepy

If you begin to feel sleepy while driving you **MUST** take a break from driving - even if you are not 'due' a break. Pull over in a safe place (never on the hard shoulder of a motorway) as soon as it is safe to do so and take a 15 minute power nap. Ideally you should also take the opportunity to get out of your vehicle to stretch your legs and get some fresh air.

Don't Rely On A Quick Fix

Never use coffee, energy drinks or winding down the window as methods of staying awake. The only solution to tiredness is sleep.



Avoid Drugs And Alcohol

You should never drink any alcohol or take any drugs when driving. Both substances are highly dangerous when driving as they have a vast number of side effects - including fatigue.

Even a very small amount of alcohol can make you feel sleepy. You should also refrain from drinking alcohol and taking drugs the night before driving as you could still be impaired the morning after.

Check Medicines

Some prescription and over-the-counter medicines can affect driving by causing drowsiness or slowing reaction times.

These can include:

- Cough medicines.
- Hay fever remedies.
- Anti-depressants.
- Anti-nausea treatments.
- Painkillers.

When you start taking a new medicine you should check with the person who dispenses it whether it is safe to drive.

Warning

Sleep-related crashes tend to be more severe, resulting in death or serious injury, because the crashes tend to occur at high speeds, with the driver being unable to take any crash-avoidance action, such as braking, before the collision.

Frequent blinking and yawning are signs of tiredness.

Avoid driving during 'tired' hours.

Take regular breaks.

Impairment through drugs, alcohol or prescription medicine must be avoided.

Get enough sleep.

Using coffee or energy drinks as a quick fix does not prevent fatigue.

Examine lifestyle factors which could be causing fatigue.

