

What are the warning signs of fatigue?

Research shows that people ARE NOT GOOD at recognizing or acting on the signs of fatigue early enough.

Gauging your fatigue can be difficult but learning to recognize the warning signs is a great way to minimize your risk on the road.

Warning signs:

- frequent yawning
- drowsiness
- sore or tired eyes
- boredom
- feeling irritable and restless
- slow reactions
- loss of concentration
- failing to check your driving mirrors (e.g., side and rearview)
- drifting from your lane
- inconsistent speed
- erratic braking
- missing an exit or turns
- hallucinations
- nodding off

(Source: New Brunswick Ministry of Public Safety)

What strategies DON'T reduce fatigued driving?

- drinking caffeine
- taking caffeine pills
- opening windows or turning on air conditioner or fan
- talking to passengers
- stopping to eat, exercise, relax but without napping/sleeping
- turning up the radio or music

These are short-term fixes at best and have no proven benefits.

What strategies DO reduce fatigued driving?

There are some simple strategies that drivers can use to avoid becoming fatigued or drowsy. These include getting enough sleep before a trip and planning carefully, as well as resting frequently during the trip.

How can I protect myself?

- Don't schedule driving trips before your usual wake-up time or after your usual bed time.
- Get a good night's sleep before driving.
- Plan ahead.
- Take regular breaks when driving for long periods.
- If possible, drive during daylight hours.
- If you are on any medication with drowsiness as a side-effect, try to postpone your trip or organize an alternate means of transportation, e.g., have a friend drive you, take a taxi, bus or train.

What should every driver know about fatigued or drowsy driving?

Once you start feeling tired or drowsy, it becomes almost impossible to predict when you will fall asleep. Stopping to nap or sleep, at regular intervals, before you become tired or drowsy can save your life.

Recognizing the onset of fatigue or drowsiness and taking a break before you start to feel fatigued or drowsy are very important; failing to recognize the warning signs of fatigue or drowsiness can seriously increase the chances for falling asleep or nodding off while driving. Once you start to feel fatigued or drowsy it may be particularly difficult to determine or gauge when you will actually fall asleep.





What effect does alcohol have on fatigue?

Alcohol on its own has a sedating effect and even small amounts of alcohol combined with fatigue can decrease driving performance. Recent research shows that six per cent of those who fell asleep or nodded off said they had consumed alcohol before driving.

Please remember that drinking and driving has its own legal implications.

What are the legal consequences associated with fatigued driving?

Charges that can be laid under **provincial and federal law** for fatigued driving include:

Criminal offences:

- Dangerous driving
- Criminal negligence
- Impaired driving - Effects of combining alcohol and fatigue

Provincial offences (under the Highway Traffic Act):

- Fail to drive in marked lane
- Leave roadway not in safety
- Unsafe lane change
- Fail to share half of roadway
- Drive left of centre
- Following too close
- Fail to signal lane change
- Fail to yield
- Disobey sign
- Speeding
- Fail to avoid collision

A variety of consequences may be applied to drivers for these offences, including:

- demerit points
- fines
- licence suspensions
- incarceration in serious cases

What are the social consequences associated with fatigued driving?

- survivor's guilt (in crashes involving death or injury)
- death of a loved one
- medical costs
- insurance costs
- legal fees
- social stigma
- temporary or permanent loss of a driver's licence
- physical rehabilitation
- loss of personal independence (employment, mobility, etc.) due to permanent disability.



Sources

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FATIGUED DRIVING

Fast Facts



PROTECT YOURSELF
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What is fatigued or drowsy driving?

Fatigued or drowsy driving occurs when a driver cannot continue to safely drive a motor vehicle because they are impaired by fatigue or drowsiness. This type of impairment can make it difficult for a driver to focus their attention on the driving task and/or decrease their ability to safely respond to changing features of the road or driving environment. Fatigue or drowsiness can increase the risk of crashing, placing the driver, passengers and other road users at risk.

Fatigued driving refers to a “disinclination to continue performing the driving task at hand”. It can occur as a result of the monotony or repetitiveness of either the driving task or the driving environment, or can occur after driving for extended periods without a rest or break from driving.

Drowsy driving is a function of the human body’s natural circadian rhythm or “sleep-wake” cycle, meaning that most people feel sleepy twice a day – at night and in the afternoon. Drivers that operate a vehicle at these times are more likely to feel drowsy.

Why do people feel fatigued or drowsy when driving?

People can feel fatigued or drowsy for different reasons. Some of the common sources of fatigue or drowsiness are discussed below:

Lack of sleep - “sleep deprivation” or “sleep debt”

Most people require an average of 6-8 hours of sleep each night to feel rested. Sleeping for fewer hours than is needed can result in a “sleep debt”. A sleep debt can also accumulate when you sleep less than is needed over

a period of several nights. Drivers who have a sleep debt or who are sleep deprived are more likely to feel fatigued when driving, and this increases their risk of falling asleep at the wheel. The only way to reduce sleep debt is to sleep the number of hours you need to feel rested each night, or to exceed your daily requirement.

Time on task

Long periods of time spent on a particular task, like driving, leads to physical and mental fatigue. One way to avoid this type of fatigue is to take breaks from driving at regular intervals.



Monotonous tasks

Repeating the same action (driving) with no variation (driving along a roadway with little traffic and little change in scenery) can result in fatigue and decrease your body's ability to react quickly and respond to changes in the driving environment.

Individual characteristics or medical conditions

Some medical conditions like sleep apnea, insomnia and narcolepsy can affect the quality of sleep, leading to sleep deprivation. Some medications including over the counter medicines (e.g., cold medicine, allergy medicine, pain relievers or other sedatives) have fatigue and drowsiness listed as a side-effect. Drivers taking such medications should read the label and follow instructions before driving.



(Source: The European Road Safety Observatory (ERSO))



Why is fatigued or drowsy driving dangerous?

Fatigued or drowsy driving is dangerous because people are not able to accurately judge when they will fall asleep. This increases their risk of falling asleep while driving, and also their risk of crashing. In addition, people who are fatigued or drowsy:

- can have slower reaction times;
- are unable to recognize dangers;
- experience poorer vision.

How big a problem is fatigued driving?

Based on self-reported numbers, in 2007, more than one million Ontario drivers (14.5%) admitted that they have fallen asleep or nodded off while driving at least once in the past year. Collectively, these drivers account for about 5.5 million trips in Ontario during which they fell asleep or nodded off.

Of those who nodded off at the wheel, 25 per cent admitted having to brake or steer to avoid being in a collision at least once. This corresponds to 573,441 trips in Ontario.

In 2006, as many as 167,000 crashes in Ontario may have been fatigue-related. It is generally estimated that about 20%-25% of all fatal and injury crashes were fatigue related.

The 2005 Ontario Road Safety Annual Report produced by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation reports that thirteen people died in a collision caused by a fatigued driver and another 624 people were injured. Across Canada, approximately 400 deaths were attributed to fatigued driving.





Who drives while fatigued?

Every person who drives can be a fatigued or drowsy driver under certain conditions. Although you may not find yourself among the traditional groups that drive while fatigued or drowsy, you are not immune to its effects. With such a large number of Ontario drivers (five million) admitting to driving while fatigued, drivers must remember that they can be at risk.

Types of drivers who are more likely to suffer from fatigue or drowsiness include:

- young males;
- persons with sleep disorders;
- drivers under the influence of alcohol;
- drivers under the influence of certain medications e.g., some cold medications;
- night or rotating shift workers e.g., emergency service workers; and,
- commercial vehicle operators e.g., tractor trailer drivers.

Is fatigued driving a cause for concern?

According to the public...

In a 2007 public opinion poll, nearly 60% of Ontario drivers reported that fatigued driving is a source of serious or extremely serious concern.

According to police...

In a 2008 Ontario survey of law enforcement, including RCMP, provincial, and municipal police forces, a majority of officers surveyed identified fatigued driving as a serious problem (95.9%).

Many officers ranked the problem as being as important as, or comparable to impaired driving (89.2%). Most of the officers who were surveyed also stated that they had stopped a driver they suspected to be impaired only to discover that they were fatigued instead (92.4%).



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