



The dangers of driving when tired

Fatigue is a major contributory factor in crashes in the UK, with too little sleep radically affecting driver attention, awareness, reaction time and ability to control the vehicle. Read our guide for tips on how to avoid falling asleep at the wheel.

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Sleepiness and driving don't mix, and feeling sleepy is especially dangerous when you are driving. Sleepiness slows your reaction time, decreases awareness and impairs your judgment, just like drugs or alcohol. People who are very sleepy behave in similar ways to people who are drunk. The impact that this has on traffic safety should not be underestimated.

The best way to ensure you stay awake:

- **Get enough sleep:** the only true remedy for fatigue and drowsiness is sleep. Above all, the key thing for long distance driving is to be well rested. So don't embark on a long journey after major stress and with a bad night's sleep behind you.
- **Power naps:** on longer trips you should take a cat nap at least every four hours. The benefits of napping are clear, but these power naps should be no longer than 20 minutes, as otherwise your body may head into deep sleep.
- **Avoid your natural low points:** adjust your driving times or your journey to avoid your body's biological low points, dictated by your circadian rhythm. These are generally between 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. and about 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. While you may miss the traffic by planning a long car ride in the middle of the night, it's definitely not a good way to prevent the dangers of drowsy driving.
- **Take regular breaks:** one of the most important long distance driving tips is to make sure you take regular breaks. Park up, relax, and leave your vehicle. A short walk in the fresh air not only gives you a chance to stretch your limbs, but also boosts the supply of oxygen into your bloodstream, increasing your ability to concentrate.
- **Food:** the right food also affects your condition. Don't drive hungry or with a full stomach – both will inhibit your performance. Eat light snacks for driving such as vegetables, which provide an energy boost while at the same time being a healthy choice. Don't consume heavy food during your journey, as this will only induce drowsiness.
- **Fluids:** you should always drink enough fluids, something that doesn't just apply to long distance driving. Drink as much water (or unsweetened juices) as possible.
- **The right amount of distraction:** it can be helpful to have other things to do on a long car ride, just not so much that they keep you from concentrating on the road. An exciting audiobook can keep you mentally fresh during a monotonous activity like driving long distances. Even better is a conversation partner, one who entertains you and notices when you're getting tired. In an ideal scenario, he or she then takes over at the wheel and gets you both to your destination safe and sound.
- **Medication and medical conditions:** be careful when driving after taking certain medication. Side effects may include drowsiness and diminished attention, which could result in drowsy driving or even microsleep. Sleeping pills, psychoactive drugs, analgesics and even allergy medicines can have this effect. If you're unsure about a medicine's effects, you should contact your doctor or pharmacist. The same applies if you suffer from medical conditions like chronic fatigue or a sleep disorder. More information can be found here.

The golden rule, and one that always applies, is safety first. If you've followed these safe driving tips to help you prevent drowsy driving but you're still tired, you definitely need to stop! Break up your journey and continue only after a good night's rest.

The best way to tackle a lack of sleep is always sleep.