

DROWSY DRIVERS

Have you ever been driving and found your eyelids start to droop, your eyes go out of focus or you can't stop yawning? Perhaps you can't remember driving the last few kilometres? If so, you have been a "Drowsy Driver" and you're not alone!

DID YOU KNOW?

More than one Australian dies every day from falling asleep at the wheel of a vehicle or from industrial accidents due to lack of sleep. Most of us are familiar with the effects of driving while intoxicated by alcohol or drugs but a lot of people don't realise driving drowsy can be just as dangerous.



Research shows that being awake for 17 hours has the same effect as being over the legal alcohol limit. We don't tolerate drunk drivers on our roads, why should we tolerate drowsy drivers? Don't let you or one of your friends be another drowsy driver who "died in his sleep". Know the signs and tips for staying safe on the road.

MYTHS

FALSE: Coffee/energy drinks help you stay awake. Caffeine may help you feel more alert for a short time however it is not a substitute sleep. There is only one way to reduce sleepiness and that is sleep.



FALSE: You know when you are going to fall asleep. In a test, nearly four-fifths of people said they could predict when they were about to fall asleep. They were wrong. If you are drowsy, you can fall asleep without realising. You also will not be able to tell how long you have been asleep for. Being asleep while driving for even a second can kill you or someone else.

People who have not had enough sleep are more likely to have "micro sleeps" (four or five second naps, often without knowing it). A vehicle travelling 80 km/h can cover up to 100 metres in the space of a micro sleep. Plenty of time to have an accident.

Excessive daytime sleepiness affects at least 20% of the population. It has a significant impact on quality of life. It can put you and others at risk of death or serious injury in motor vehicle and workplace accidents.

Accurately identifying the cause of daytime sleepiness is important, not only due to the negative impacts of sleepiness and its root causes on health and social function, but because excessive sleepiness can generally be remedied with appropriate treatment.

If you are feeling sleepy or excessively tired in the day despite sleeping regularly for at least eight hours a night, speak to your doctor.

WE CAN'T CHEAT SLEEP. THE ONLY CURE FOR SLEEPINESS IS SLEEP.

SIGNS OF DROWSINESS

- Heavy eyelids, eyes closing, frequent blinking, or trouble focusing
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting between lanes, hitting a shoulder
- Constant yawning, rubbing your eyes
- Daydreaming/wandering thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating on driving, missing exits or traffic signs

If you are feeling sleepy or notice any of these signs, stop driving immediately.

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE ON THE ROAD

- Make sure you have had plenty of sleep before you leave. Less than six hours sleep in the prior 24 hours puts you at a significantly higher risk of a fatigue related accident that can result in death or serious injury.
- Be aware of the effects of medications you are taking (some may increase drowsiness).
- Plan to rest at least 15 minutes every 2 hours and don't drive for more than 10 hours in a day.
- Don't rush. It's better to arrive at your destination safe than on time.
- Do not drink alcohol. Even very small amounts of alcohol will enhance drowsiness.
- Avoid driving when you're supposed to be asleep (e.g. 1am and 6am), as this is when sleepiness is most intense.
- Do not rely on short-term remedies to offset the feelings of fatigue e.g., turning up music, drinking coffee/energy drinks etc. If you feel tired or notice signs of drowsiness pull over and take a short power nap.


ABOUT US

Sleep Disorders Australia (SDA) is a voluntary not-for-profit organisation that provides information and support to people affected by sleep disorders throughout Australia. SDA advocates the needs of people with sleep disorders by raising awareness of sleep disorders and their impact on our lives. We also offer support and education with regards to preventing and treating sleep disorders.


We would be delighted if you joined us. Membership is open to sufferers, family members, medical professionals, and the general public. You can join via our website or email our membership officer for more information.

If you would like to support us financially, you can donate via our website or send a cheque to our address.


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DISCLAIMER: Information in this fact sheet is general in nature. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Discuss with your doctor if you are concerned about your sleep or other medical conditions.

