



How Dangerous is Drowsy Driving?

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When most people think of reckless driving, they think of people coming home from the bar, swerving in and out of lanes. But not all reckless driving is alcohol-related — drowsy driving can be just as dangerous. In the past year, one in ten people have admitted to falling asleep at the wheel and one in six people have been in a deadly crash due to drowsy driving. In comparison, one in three people have gotten into deadly alcohol-related crashes. In many ways, the effects of drowsy driving are much the same as drunk driving. People who have been awake for 17 to 19 hours performed worse on a driving test than people with a .05 blood alcohol level.

And just as teenagers and young people are more affected by alcohol, drowsy driving may be a larger problem for the younger demographic as well. Teenagers need more sleep than adults, but often times get less than the recommended nine hours. Teens are staying up late studying, working part-time jobs, and taking part in extra-curriculars which prevents them from getting a full nights sleep. Early school times are also a large contributor to teen drowsy driving accidents. One study found that before school accident rates dropped by 16.5% when the county moved the school start time an hour later.

Most of the time, falling asleep happens unconsciously and unexpectedly which makes it hard to prevent. There are some warning signs to signal that you're starting to get sleepy at the wheel. Small, inconspicuous signs like trouble focusing on the road and frequent blinking are signals that you may be starting to feel sleepy. Bigger signs like swerving from your lane and hitting the curb might mean that you should pull over and grab a cup of coffee.

If a Venti Latté doesn't do the trick, don't just push through the drooping eyelids — utilize other options. If you wake up after a particularly restless night, use public transportation to stay off the roads and get a few extra minutes of rest in before you start your day. Keep your brain stimulated with some music or a radio show. Driving in silence makes it easier for your tired brain to drift off and daydream. If you are on a long road trip, driving with a companion can be helpful in keeping the ride moving along, and provide frequent rests for the drivers. If you are alone, make frequent stops to rest your eyes and recharge your brain — don't keep going if you start to notice warning signs. Take the extra few minutes out of your day to rest and replenish to keep you and everyone on the road safe.