

Drowsy Driving

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drowsy drivers are four times more likely to be involved in a crash or near crash. Although sleepiness can affect crashes any time of day, drowsy-driving crashes most frequently occur between midnight and 6 a.m., or in the late-afternoon—both times when there are dips in your circadian rhythm (the internal human body clock that regulates sleep).

Wake up! Stay alert at the wheel.



- ▶ Get between 7 and 9 hours of sleep the night before starting a trip.
- ▶ Arrange for a travel companion to share the driving.
- ▶ Avoid eating a heavy meal before driving, as it may induce drowsiness.
- ▶ Stop for a drink of caffeine.
- ▶ Apply cold water to eyelids, face and neck.
- ▶ Schedule breaks about every 100 miles or two hours during long trips.
- ▶ Stop at a safe place to stretch and take a three-minute brisk walk or jog.
- ▶ Pull off the road and find a safe place, such as a rest area, to take a 15-to-20 minute nap.
- ▶ Stop driving! Pull off at the next exit or rest area to find a safe place to sleep for the night.
- ▶ Buckle up! A properly worn seat belt reduces fatigue by supporting an upright position.

Does caffeine really help?

Caffeine promotes short-term alertness and takes approximately 30 minutes to begin working. To get the maximum benefit, pull over for a caffeinated beverage, take a short nap, then get back on the road.

Be aware that if you drink caffeine and are seriously sleep-deprived, you still may have “micro sleeps” or brief losses of consciousness that can last for four or five seconds. This means that at 55 miles per hour, you’ve traveled more than 100 yards while asleep. That’s plenty of time to cause a crash.

Dangers of drowsy driving

- ▶ Reduced hand-eye coordination
- ▶ Slow reaction time
- ▶ Reduced accuracy
- ▶ Lapse of attention
- ▶ Diminished ability to see subtle changes
- ▶ Compromised decision making

According to NHTSA’s National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Study, drowsy drivers involved are twice as likely to make performance errors in a crash as compared to drivers who are not fatigued. In extreme cases, a drowsy driver may fall asleep at the wheel.

Who is most at risk?

While no one is immune, according to NHTSA, the following groups are at highest risk, based on evidence from crash reports and self-reports of sleep behavior and driving performance:

- Young male drivers (17-23 years old)
- People with sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, insomnia, restless leg syndrome or narcolepsy
- Shift workers who work at night or work long or irregular hours
- People who sleep less than six hours per night

Did you know?



According to a study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, people who sleep six to seven hours a night are twice as likely to be involved in such a crash as those sleeping four hours or more, while people sleeping less than five hours increased their risk four to five times.

When do most crashes occur?

Although sleepiness can affect all types of crashes during the entire day and night, drowsy-driving crashes most frequently occur between midnight and 6 a.m. or in the late-afternoon – both times when there are dips in your circadian rhythm (the internal human body clock that regulates sleep).

Do rumble strips help prevent crashes?

Rumble strips are raised or grooved patterns on the roadway center or shoulder that provide both an audible warning (rumbling sound) and a physical vibration to alert drivers that they are leaving the driving lane.

Many drowsy-driving crashes involve a single vehicle, a driver with no passengers, running off the road at a high rate of speed with no evidence of braking. According to the Federal Highway Safety Administration, rumble strips are proven to be one of the most cost-effective measures to help prevent roadway departure crashes.

There are two types of rumble strips used in Kentucky:



SHOULDER

Shoulder: Most state-maintained roads have rumble strips located on the shoulder to prevent lane departure collisions.

Center: Selected state-maintained roads with two or four lanes not divided by a median have rumble strips in the center to prevent head-on collisions.



CENTER

For additional information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: www.nhtsa.gov
- National Sleep Foundation: <https://sleepfoundation.org/drowsy-driving>