

Excerpt from
New York Dept. of Motor Vehicles
Driver's Manual

DROWSY AND FATIGUED DRIVING

Sleeping and driving do not mix. When you are behind the wheel of a car or truck, being fatigued is dangerous. Drivers who are tired have slower reaction times, decreased awareness, and impaired judgment. As with drugs and alcohol, drowsiness can contribute to a traffic crash.

Symptoms of Fatigue – Researchers have found the following **symptoms to be associated with drowsy driving**:

-  **Your eyes close** or go out of focus by themselves.
-  You have trouble keeping your head up.
-  You cannot stop yawning.
-  You **have wandering, disconnected thoughts.**
-  You **do not remember driving the last few miles.**
-  You drift between lanes, tailgate, or miss traffic signs.
-  You keep jerking the car back into the lane.
-  You **have drifted off the road and hit the rumble strips which produce a loud noise and vibrations.**

Who is Most At Risk? All Drivers who are:

-  **Sleep-deprived or fatigued.**
-  Driving long distances without rest breaks.
-  Driving through the night, the early afternoon, or at times when you are normally asleep.
-  Taking medication that increases sleepiness or drinking alcohol
-  Driving alone.
-  Driving on **long, rural, boring roads.**
-  Frequent travelers, e.g., business travelers and long-distance commuters.
-  Young People – Sleep related crashes are **most common for young people, who tend to stay up late, sleep too little, and drive at night.**
-  Shift Workers – Drivers who have non-traditional work schedules have a greater risk of being involved in a fatigue-related driving traffic crash.
-  People With Undiagnosed Sleep Disorders – The presence of a sleep disorder increases the risk of crashes. If you find you are regularly tired during the day or

experience any of these symptoms on a regular basis, you may have a sleep disorder and should seek medical help.

Effective Countermeasures

Prevention – **Before you embark on a trip**, you should:

-  Get a good night's sleep.
-  Plan to drive long trips with a companion.
-  Schedule regular stops for every 100 miles or 2 hours.
-  Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about any medication you are taking. Alcohol interacts with fatigue; increasing its effects.
-  You are not at your best if you are ill or very tired. Do not drive for at least 15 minutes after waking from sleep.

Actions for the Drowsy Driver – Once driving, you should:

-  Recognize that you are in danger of falling asleep and cannot predict when sleep may occur.
-  Not depend on the radio, open window or other “tricks” to keep you awake.
-  Respond to symptoms of fatigue by finding a safe place to stop for a break.
-  Pull off into a safe area from traffic and **take a brief nap (15 to 45 minutes)**.
-  **Drink coffee** or another source of caffeine to promote short-term alertness if needed. (It takes about 30 minutes for caffeine to enter the bloodstream.)