



# Driver FATIGUE

Driving whilst tired can be a fatal mistake. Studies across the world suggest that driver fatigue is continually a factor in a significant number of incidents, and up to a quarter of all driver deaths. Tiredness is a common problem.

## CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Lack of, or disturbed sleep  
This could be due to disruptions in life such as a new baby, busy schedules or stress, or could be due to sleep disorders such as insomnia or sleep apnoea.
- Irregular sleep patterns  
Research has found shift workers are particularly high risk for sleep-related crashes.
- Time of day  
Early morning (2am-6am) and early afternoon (2pm-4pm) are the most common times for fatigue related incidents.
- Driving for long periods  
Studies have found after two hours of continuous driving you become less able to concentrate, and your reaction times slow down.
- Medication  
Some prescription and over-the-counter drugs can cause drowsiness.

## AUTUMNAL CHANGES

As the year draws to a close, the impending clock changes mean that many of us will see an increased amount of driving in the dark. Combined with fatigue, this will increase driving risks such as being dazzled by oncoming headlights. If this happens, slow down and stop if necessary, always watch for pedestrians or cyclists (who may be more difficult to see in low light) and look towards the edge of your side of the road until the vehicle has passed.

It's also a good reminder to us all to check our lights are working properly before starting a journey. Autumn also brings more wet weather as well as fallen leaves and mud on the road, so make sure you always drive at a safe and appropriate speed for the conditions.

## REDUCE THE RISK

Driver fatigue is recognised across the world as a silent killer, but there are things you can do as the driver to reduce your risk and make sure you complete your journey safely:

- **Eyesight** – when did you last have your eyesight tested? Your vision is an important part of your fitness to drive
- **Sleep** – get a good night's sleep the night before your journey. Aim for at least 8 hours.
- **Journey Planning** – plan sufficient breaks. The recommendation is to take a break every 2 hours. The more you drive the longer it will take to recharge so if you are driving for long periods increase the length of your breaks throughout the day.
- **Car Sharing** – where possible, being able to share the driving with a colleague can significantly reduce fatigue risk. This will enable periods of rest and a break from the high level of concentration required when driving

## WHAT TO DO

Many drivers try to stay awake by turning up the air conditioning, winding down the window, listening to the radio, talking or singing.

These will only work for a few minutes, to give you time to **find somewhere safe to stop**. They **WILL NOT** stop you from falling asleep.

While you are looking for a safe place to stop you should also try to keep a greater distance between you and any vehicles in front. This will give you more time to react in case of problems.

## MICRO-SLEEPS

A micro-sleep is a brief and unintended episode of light sleep that can last up to 30 seconds or more.

The brain goes to sleep involuntarily, and often you aren't even aware it has occurred until your head snaps up when you come out of it. You may also notice yourself nodding or closing your eyes, but by then it may already be too late.

Drivers are particularly vulnerable to micro-sleeps on faster roads like highways/motorways due to the monotonous road environment and lack of driver stimulation. They occur more often in early mornings or mid-afternoon.

