

Drowsy Driving Awareness

National Sleep Awareness Week March 28- April 3, 2005

Drowsy driving is dangerous and often results in injury or death. Drowsy driving can be as dangerous as driving drunk. Just as alcohol can impair driver performance, drowsiness can slow reaction time, impair judgment and increase the risk of a crash. Falling asleep at the wheel or the inability to pay adequate attention while driving may be a result of being sleep deprived. The National Traffic Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that there are 100,000 police-reported crashes resulting in 1,550 deaths and 71,000 injuries annually as the result of drowsy driving. Each year drowsy driving related crashes cost 12.5 billion dollars nationally. New York State has begun to examine crash data to determine if drowsy driving is a contributing factor.



When Is It Most Likely To Happen?

Most drowsy driving crashes happen at predictable times. The human body runs on a 24-hour cycle, in which we have predictable times of wakefulness and sleepiness. Between 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm and then again from 2:00am to 6:00 am we are most likely to feel fatigued and our risk of being involved in a drowsy driving-related crash increases.

Who's At Risk?

Anyone of us is at risk of being a drowsy driver. Any motorist who has not obtained adequate sleep can become fatigued and experience a decrease of alertness when driving. According to the National Sleep Foundation 51% of adults reported to have driven drowsy and 17% reported falling asleep at the wheel in the past year. Those most at risk include: young drivers, shift workers, truck drivers, new parents, and parents of young children.



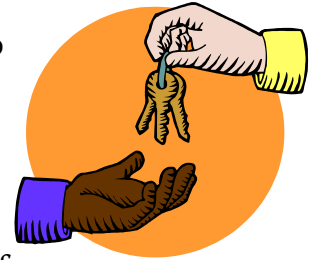
- Young drivers are inexperienced and may not be aware of the dangers of drowsy driving. Contributing to their risk of sleep deprivation are the hectic schedules that teens keep staying up late doing homework, working part-time jobs, or going out late with their friends.
- On a regular basis, shift workers are up working at times their bodies would prefer to sleep. The body is preprogrammed to sleep at certain times and their jobs force them to be awake when they should be sleeping.
- Truck drivers often work long hours trying to meet deadlines and may travel longer than they should. Drivers may also drive through the night adding to the risk of being in a drowsy driving related crash.
- New parents and parents of young children often do not get adequate sleep trying to meet the demanding needs of parenthood. Newborns and sick children require extra time and add to parents' lack of sleep.

Warning Signs of Drowsy Driving

There are several warning signs a driver is drowsy. Repeated yawning, driver inattention, inability to keep eyes open and head raised, not remembering the last few miles traveled, having wandering or disconnected thoughts and drifting out of the lane or hitting rumble strips are all indications that the driver should pull over in a safe rest area to take a nap or switch drivers.

What Can Be Done?

The best approach is to get adequate rest before you drive. If you begin to feel drowsy, share the driving with a passenger or take a break every two hours or every 100 miles, or find a safe rest area to pull off and take a nap. This is more effective than trying to stay awake by opening the window, turning up the radio, or trying to get by with caffeine. It takes approximately 30 minutes for caffeine to be effective and the relief is only temporary. The only long lasting solution is to get adequate sleep. If fatigued after a shift, try to find a quiet place at work to sleep before getting on the road or ask someone to pick you up.



Getting Better Sleep

Getting sufficient sleep is important; on average Americans have a sleep cycle that requires 8 hours of sleep. In today's fast paced world it can be difficult to get adequate sleep, however, we all need to make this a priority. Being well rested is not only important to driving but in our everyday life.

Not only is getting enough sleep important so is the quality of your sleep. Maintain a healthy lifestyle helps to promote good quality sleep. To improve the quality of your sleep try implementing the following suggestions:

- Regular exercise- promotes good sleep, however it should be done at least 3 hours prior to bedtime
- Consistent sleep patterns - keeping a regular schedule of sleep and wake times even on the weekends helps prevent sleeping disruptions
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine around bedtime- Alcohol increases the number of nighttime awakenings. Caffeine and nicotine act as stimulants, which disrupt sleep.



For more information on the importance of sleep and the effects of drowsy driving visit the web sites listed below:

New York State Department of Health www.health.state.ny.us/

National Sleep Foundation www.sleepfoundation.org and www.drowsydriving.org

New York State Governor's Traffic Safety Committee www.nysgtsc.state.ny.us/drow-ndx.htm

NIH- National Center on Sleep Disorders Research www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr/index.htm

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety www.aaafoundation.org

National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration www.nhtsa.dot.gov

New York State Department of Motor Vehicles <http://www.nydmv.state.ny.us/>