

Tips to Avoid Drowsy Driving



Drowsy driving can occur when a person has not slept enough, but it may also happen due to untreated sleep disorders, certain medications and shift work.

Driving while sleepy accounts for an estimated 100,000 car accidents annually by reducing alertness, delaying reaction times and impairing decision-making skills.

Drowsy driving can occur when a person has not slept enough, but it may also happen due to untreated sleep disorders, certain medications and shift work. Drivers who notice any of the following signs should have another passenger take the wheel or pull off the road to a safe location and rest:

- Yawning or blinking frequently
- Forgetting the past few miles driven
- Difficulty maintaining proper speed
- Missing a road sign or exit
- Drifting from your lane
- Hitting “rumble strips” on the road

Prevent Drowsy Driving Before Taking the Wheel

Making it a daily priority to get sufficient sleep is the best way to prevent drowsy driving. There are many things people can do before and during bedtime to improve the quality of their sleep:

- **Get a full night's rest:** While sleep needs vary from person to person, most adults should aim for at least 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- **Be consistent:** Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, including on the weekends.
- **Put away electronics:** Avoid using devices like smart phones and tablets at least one hour before bedtime.
- **Create a peaceful sleeping environment:** Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and at a comfortable temperature.
- **Relax before sleeping:** Prepare yourself for sleep with a relaxing activity like reading or meditation.
- **Watch what you eat and drink:** Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.

- **Exercise regularly:** Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

When to Seek Help for Sleep Problems

About 70 million Americans suffer from some type of chronic sleep problem. Sleep disorders are conditions that affect a person's ability to fall or remain asleep, make it difficult to stay awake during the day, impact a healthy sleep schedule or result in unusual behaviors that disrupt sleep. Some of the most common sleep problems include:

- **Obstructive sleep apnea**, where a person stops breathing during sleep
- **Restless leg syndrome**, where a person experiences an intense and often irresistible urge to move their legs
- **Narcolepsy**, where a person has difficulty controlling whether they sleep or stay awake
- **Insomnia**, where a person has trouble falling asleep or staying asleep

Local Care for Sleep Disorders

The Salem Sleep Center offers a comfortable setting for a variety of diagnostic sleep studies that can help identify sleep problems. A service of Salem Regional Medical Center, the Salem Sleep Center is located at 2094 East State Street, Suite F, in Salem. For more information, call 866-520-5646.