



## Fatigue Reduction: Driving

### What impact does fatigue have on driving?

According to the Department of Transport's THINK! campaign, nearly a fifth of accidents on major roads are sleep-related.

Crashes caused by drivers falling asleep typically involve vehicles running off the road or into the back of another vehicle. Crashes involving drivers falling asleep, or having microsleeps, result in a high risk of death or serious injury, as drivers don't brake before crashing. Microsleeps are short bouts of unintentional sleep that can last for several seconds, which occur when we are very tired, or when all the conditions are right.



This Network Rail driver fell asleep behind the wheel. Fortunately there were no serious injuries.

### Did you know...

- The most common time to fall asleep behind the wheel is **between 2:00am–6:00am**, when alertness is at its lowest. There is another dip in alertness **around 2:00pm - 4:00pm**.
- Motorways and dual carriageways are the most common roads for sleep-related crashes, due to the monotonous road environment and lack of interruptions or driver stimulation. **Regular breaks help relieve the monotony.**
- There isn't a specific law that states that it is an offence to drive when you are tired, but the chances of a driver committing a driving offence while tired are increased; this is mentioned in the Highway Code (rules 91 and 262). If you are found to have been asleep when an accident occurred, depending on the severity of the collision and any injuries sustained, **you could find yourself charged with dangerous driving**, the penalties for which can be severe.



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### What can I do to reduce the risk?

There are a lot of misconceptions around fatigue and driving. Opening a window or chewing gum will not improve your alertness, so don't rely on these myths. Instead, take the [Fatigue Awareness eLearning](#) so you know how to improve your alertness in preparation for your drive and...

- Plan your journey to allow time for breaks. Plan for at least 15 minutes, at least every two hours.
- Share the driving on a long journey, if you can.
- If possible, time your journey to avoid driving when your alertness is naturally at its lowest.
- Consider the effect of any medication on your driving. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.
- Make sure you know what emergency countermeasures you can take if you find you're having problems maintaining alertness mid-journey.



### Things to think about

- Do you know what the warning signs of fatigue are?
- Have you ever experienced a microsleep whilst driving? If so, what action did you take?
- Do you think of travelling times and methods when planning work activities?
- What can you and your team do to reduce your driving fatigue risk?



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### Emergency countermeasure

Even with the best preparation, there will be times when you have to drive, and may experience problems maintaining alertness behind the wheel.

**This is the time to apply this emergency countermeasure:**

1. **STOP DRIVING**: Park somewhere safe, not on the hard shoulder. Ideally find a service station or similar safe place **off the motorway**.
2. **Call someone**: Let them know you are stopping. For example, call your destination, so they know you'll be late.
3. **Have a caffeine-rich drink**: Like 2 cups of coffee or an energy drink.
4. **Take a 15 to 20-minute nap**: Lock the doors for safety.

If after waking up and taking time to refresh you still feel tired, **you are not fit to drive** and should take proper rest.

### Important things to remember:

- Caffeine takes about 20 minutes to take effect, this “window of opportunity” is perfect for a short nap of no more than 15-20min. Any longer can lead to you falling into a deep sleep, and wake up feeling groggy (a condition known as sleep inertia).
- Remember to set an alarm for 20 minutes to stop you sleeping too long.
- Take another 5-10 minutes to recover after waking and fully wake up before beginning to drive again.

