

TEEN DROWSY DRIVING



QUICK FACTS:

Each year drowsy driving causes thousands of deaths on our roads. The risk of drowsy driving is highest among teens and young adults. The best way to prevent drowsy driving is to get sufficient nightly sleep. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends that teens sleep 8 to 10 hours per night for optimal health. However, many teens fail to get the sleep that they need on a regular basis.

KEY POINTS:

- **Teens between 13 and 18 years of age should sleep 8 to 10 hours per night.**
- **Getting proper sleep prepares you to remain alert behind the wheel.**
- **Insufficient sleep can severely impair your driving ability.**
- **Teens and young adults have the highest risk of drowsy driving.**
- **Drowsy driving can be deadly.**

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Surveys show that most teens are getting less than eight hours of sleep on school nights. Some stay up late and sleep for only five or six hours before starting another school day. This means that the average high school student misses about one to three hours of sleep on school nights. The result is a weekly sleep debt of five to 15 hours.

Teens compensate for weekday sleep loss by sleeping in much later on the weekends. This irregularity disrupts their body clock. As a result, it is even harder for them to fall asleep at night. This ongoing sleep loss can have a negative effect on the driving performance of teens.

Drowsy driving is much like drunk driving. Sleepiness at the wheel reduces alertness and reaction time. It also impairs your ability to pay attention and make decisions. Teens who drive drowsy are much more likely to be in a motor vehicle accident. These accidents often occur when the drowsy driver drifts into the other lane of traffic or runs off the road. Drowsy driving accidents often involve a fatality.

TIPS TO PREVENT DROWSY DRIVING:

To prevent drowsy driving you should make it a priority to get 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Avoid driving late at night when your body expects to be sleeping. It is also safer to avoid driving alone. On a long road trip, alternate driving with another passenger.

Pull over or have another passenger take the wheel if you experience any of these warning signs of drowsy driving:

- You keep yawning or are unable to keep your eyes open.
- You catch yourself “nodding off” and have trouble keeping your head up.
- You can’t remember driving the last few miles.
- You end up too close to cars in front of you.
- You miss road signs or drive past your turn.
- You drift into the other lane of traffic.
- You drift onto the “rumble strip” or onto the shoulder of the road.

Creating a relaxing sleep environment and developing healthy sleep habits also are important to prevent drowsy driving:

- Make your bedroom quiet, dark and comfortably cool at night.
- Turn off all of your electronic devices (cell phone, TV, computer, video games) at least one hour before bedtime.
- Avoid taking long naps during the day. If you take naps, limit them to no more than 30 minutes in the early afternoon.
- Do not drink caffeine in the late afternoon or evening.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine and stick to it every night.
- Develop a consistent sleep schedule by trying to go to bed and wake up at the same times each day, even on weekends.

➔ Next Steps:

- Make it a priority to sleep 8 to 10 hours each night.
- Refuse to drive when you feel drowsy.
- Pull off the road to a safe location if you feel sleepy behind the wheel.
- Talk to your sleep doctor about any ongoing sleep problems.

Questions For Your Physician



Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.

Sample Questions:



Why do I feel tired all the time?

Why do I wake up so early in the morning?