# Don’t Drowse & Drive

At this time of year, there’s lot of important awareness messages around ‘don’t drink and drive’, but did you know 20% of all car accidents have fatigue as a contributory factor?

In fact, driving when tired is a serious problem, yet often ignored as a risk. According to ROSPA, driver fatigue causes thousands of road accidents each year – some fatal and serious. And men are three times as likely to women to say they have fallen asleep at the wheel.

**Crashes caused by tired drivers are most likely to happen:**

* On long journeys on monotonous roads, such as motorways
* Between 2am and 6am
* Between 2pm and 4pm (especially after eating, or taking even one alcoholic drink)
* After having less sleep than normal
* After drinking alcohol
* If taking medicines that cause drowsiness
* After long working hours or on journeys home after long shifts, especially night shifts

There are many dangers of being sleepy while driving.  If you’re sleep deprived, not only are you less alert but you’re less likely to make good decisions, have fast reaction times or focus on tasks which could have serious consequences for the health and the safety of yourself and others.

Not only that but lack of sleep will affect your mood – making you more liable to swings in temper. According to research bad sleepers suffer twice as much road rage as rested drivers.  They also make nearly double the blunders in and out the car and have twice the memory lapses.

Driving when tired can be as dangerous as drink-driving and is a significant factor in many rear end crashes. Did you know that if a worker loses just one night of sleep his cognitive ability is roughly the same as being over the legal alcohol limit? Unlike with alcohol though, police have no way of measuring whether a driver is impaired by fatigue. It’s really down to an individual to make sure they’re good to drive.

## **DRIVING FOR WORK**

According to Department for Transport figures, more than a quarter of all road traffic incidents may involve somebody who is driving as part of their work at the time.

Most employers will have a road safety policy which should lay down rules to help prevent fatigue-related accidents. The work-related road safety checklist can be a useful tool for employers with topics around if drivers are aware of how dangerous tiredness can be and what to do if they start to feel sleepy. If you’re a company driver, don’t feel pressured into breaking guidelines to meet deadlines.

## **IS IT AGAINST THE LAW TO DRIVE WHILE TIRED?**

There isn’t a specific offence of driving when tired but doing so significantly increases the chance of you committing other offences or causing a collision. The penalty for causing death by dangerous driving is up to 14 years imprisonment.

You must also [tell DVLA if you have a medical condition](https://www.gov.uk/sleepiness-and-driving) that makes you very sleepy during the time that you would normally be awake. You could be fined up to £1000 if you don’t and may be prosecuted if you’re involved in a crash as a result.

## **SIGNS OF DROWSY DRIVING**

Whether it’s been a late night or a disturbed night, lost sleep can be hard to control especially when you’re driving and trying desperately to stay awake.

* Trouble focusing
* Heavy eyelids
* Unable to remember how you’ve driven
* Lane drifting
* Yawning constantly
* Bobbing your head

## **IF YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING SLEEPY, FOLLOW OUR TOP TIPS FOR STAYING AWAKE**

* **Get some fresh air.**Pull over and have a walk around for 10-15 minutes. It will make you more alert and is a good distraction if you’ve been driving for a period of time. If you really can’t stop or find a suitable space to stop, then open a window or turn the air con on.
* **Listen to music.** Perk yourself up by listening to music. Music triggers emotional responses in humans, helping us engage many parts of the brain.
* **Food faux pas:** Avoid high carb or sugary foods that give you that mid-morning/afternoon crash and try not to eat so you’re full. Excess eating leaves you sleepy.
* **Stay hydrated:** Being dehydrated can make you feel sleepy and dizzy so keep a cold bottle of water to drink close by.
* **Power napping:** If you’ve a long drive ahead try to break the journey up with a power nap – around 15-20 minutes. Find a safe and suitable location and pull over and nod off.
* **Caffeine Fix:** If you find yourself feeling sleepy find a safe place to stop and drink two cups of coffee or high-caffeine drink. Rest for around 10-15 minutes to allow time for the caffeine to kick in.
* **Regular routines:** Ultimately the best way to stop yourself feeling sleepy at work is to get regular good quality sleep at night.  Going to bed and getting up at roughly the same time, all the time, will programme your body to sleep better. Make sure your bed is comfortable. It’s difficult to get deep, restful sleep on one that’s too soft, too hard, too small or too old. Also ensure your [environment](https://sleepcouncil.org.uk/perfect-sleep-environment/) is fit for rest and sleep. It should be neither too hot, nor too cold; and as quiet and dark as possible.
* **Remember, the only real cure for sleepiness is proper sleep.** A caffeine drink or a nap is a short-term solution that will only allow you to keep driving for a short time. And in the long run, relying on caffeine and napping will only lead to further sleep problems.