

# USC Center for Work & Family Life

## Fatigue and Drowsiness

Fatigue is the decreased capacity to function normally because of excessive stimulation or exertion, and usually manifests itself as drowsiness or general weariness. It can be caused by a lack of sleep; physical overexertion; overeating; driving down long, monotonous stretches of road; or physiological overload caused by prolonged stress. Fatigue compromises your ability to concentrate, slows your reaction time, and may affect your ability to control the vehicle.

### To avoid fatigue before starting out:

- ◆ Get enough sleep on regular basis.
- ◆ Monitor your physical condition before entering your vehicle. If you feel extremely tired, do not drive.
- ◆ Avoid driving late at night. Most drivers are less alert at night, especially after midnight.
- ◆ Do not take any drugs that can make you drowsy.
- ◆ Don't overeat, and attempt to space meals so that digestion doesn't require so much from your body that it interferes with the task of driving.
- ◆ Exercise can help you to build up endurance, but do not exercise vigorously just prior to driving long distance.

### To deal with fatigue that occurs during driving:

- ◆ Split long drives into shorter segments, stopping and resting between segments whether you feel tired or not.
- ◆ Move around during rest breaks to get your blood flowing.
- ◆ Force yourself to attend to the driving task by checking mirrors, looking ahead, and keeping your eyes moving. This will help you to maintain alertness.
- ◆ Try chewing gum or singing along to the radio.
- ◆ Roll down your window to get some fresh air.
- ◆ In extreme cases, pull over at a rest stop and take a nap.

There are many underlying causes of sleepiness, fatigue and drowsy driving. Including sleep loss from restriction or too little sleep, interruption or fragmented sleep; chronic sleep debt; circadian factors associated with driving patterns or work schedules; undiagnosed or untreated sleep disorders; time spent on a task; the use of sedating medications; and the consumption of alcohol when already tired. These factors have cumulative effects and a combination of any of these can greatly increase one's risk for a fatigue-related crash.

### Sleepiness or Fatigue Causes the Following:

- ◆ Impaired reaction time, judgment and vision
- ◆ Problems with information processing and short-term memory
- ◆ Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation
- ◆ Increased moodiness and aggressive behavior

For more information feel free to call CWFL at (213) 821-0800 or visit [www.usc.edu/worklife](http://www.usc.edu/worklife)