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## Fatigued Driving

The dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol or driving while texting are well-documented. Most people avoid texting while driving and would never consider driving under the influence, but is the same consideration given to driving while fatigued? Do you ever find yourself looking for ways to stay awake behind the wheel?

It's estimated that fatigued or drowsy driving may be involved in more than 100,000 crashes each year, resulting in 40,000 injuries and 1,550 deaths. A recent study by Virginia Tech Transportation Institute shows that drivers are at a four times greater risk of a crash or near-crash if they choose to drive while fatigued, and that approximately 12% of all crashes and near-crashes in the population are due to fatigue. In addition, being awake for 24 hours or more has the same effect on your coordination as being legally drunk.

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## Resources

- [SleepFoundation.org](http://SleepFoundation.org)
- [DrowsyDriving.org](http://DrowsyDriving.org)
- [Virginia Tech Fatigue Study](#)

## Want to know more?

We're committed to providing you unrivaled loss control services. Contact your dedicated United Heartland Loss Control representative today or visit our website at [UnitedHeartland.com](http://UnitedHeartland.com).

According to the National Sleep Foundation's Sleep in America poll, 60% of Americans have driven while feeling sleepy and 37% admit to having actually fallen asleep at the wheel in the past year. Too many times we think we can simply "push through" until we get to our destination, not recognizing the seriousness of the issue.

Fatigued driving isn't just for late nights or early mornings, although the chance of a crash due to fatigue is highest during these periods. While individual peaks and valleys may differ, our body's natural cycle impacts our alertness. We tend to hit our alertness peak at 10 a.m. with a gradual decline until mid-afternoon, hitting the lowest point in the cycle between 2 and 5 a.m.

## Signs of Fatigue

Unfortunately, we are not very good at recognizing we're fatigued. If you have ever experienced any of the following, you have driven while fatigued and were at increased risk of a crash, putting yourself, your passengers and those around you at risk of injury or death:

- You realized you do not remember passing some exits or key landmarks. ("How did I get here?")
- Your mind wanders and you find yourself daydreaming.
- Your eyelids feel heavy.
- You can't stop yawning or blinking.
- You have difficulty staying in your lane (a major reason they have added rumble strips to highways).

## Tips to Reduce Fatigued or Drowsy Driving

There are many myths on ways to stay awake if you start to feel tired while driving: rolling down a window or turning up the radio are commonly mentioned, but do not work. What does work?

- Getting a good night's sleep (ideally 8 hours) prior to the trip.
- Stopping every 60 to 90 minutes to take a break and to walk briskly.
- Avoiding medications that can cause drowsiness.

If you do feel tired, stop. Consume a caffeinated beverage and take a short nap (15 to 45 minutes). The nap will allow the caffeine to take effect and you will be able to resume driving. At the first opportunity, stop where you can get a good night's sleep.

Whether you are planning a family vacation with extended drive time, have a long commute or drive for work, remember that as a driver you have a responsibility to your passengers and those around you to get to your destination safely. Approach fatigued driving as you would driving under the influence and do all you can to avoid it.

