



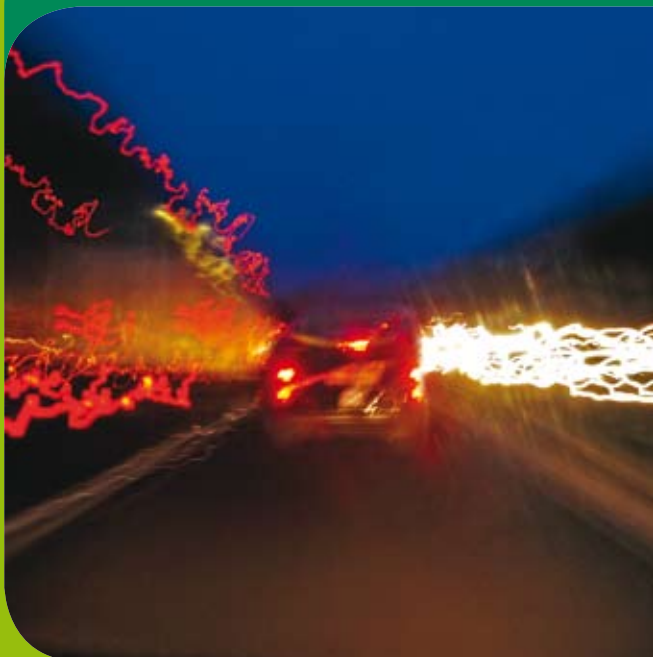
Driver and Vehicle
Licensing Agency

INF159

Think! Tiredness can kill

Advice for drivers

For more information go to www.direct.gov.uk/motoring



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

11/08

An executive agency of the
Department for
Transport



Facts you might like to know

- Up to one fifth of accidents on motorways and other monotonous types of roads may be caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel.
- Although many accidents are attributed initially to “driver inattention”, once other causes are excluded (vehicle faults, poor road and weather conditions, traffic offences and blackouts), investigation suggests driver sleepiness as a common factor.
- Typically, in sleep related crashes, the signs of emergency braking are absent and there is a failure to respond to clearly visible road/traffic conditions.
- 18 – 30 year old males are more likely to fall asleep at the wheel, when driving late at night.
- Leisure Drivers – drive longer distances at key Bank Holiday times than they are used to, causing fatigue.
- Driving for work – 40% of all fatigue related crashes involve someone who was driving for work at the time.

Modern life styles such as early morning starts, shift work, late night socialising, often lead to excessive tiredness by preventing adequate rest.

Other factors that can aggravate tiredness

After eating a large meal – natural sleepiness occurs.

Changes in body rhythm produce a natural increased tendency to sleep at two parts of the day.

- Midnight – 6am
- 2pm – 4pm

Medication – Prescribed or over-the-counter medication can cause sleepiness as a side effect. Always check the label.

Alcohol – alcohol consumed in the afternoon maybe twice as potent in terms of producing sleepiness and driving impairment as the same amount taken in the evening, although **no one should drink and drive at any time.**

What should I do?

Most factors can be addressed by behaving responsibly.

- Take breaks on long journeys
- Do not ignore the feelings of tiredness
- Do not ignore the first signs of sleepiness
- When signs of sleepiness are recognised, stop the vehicle safely in a lay-by or service area for 20 minutes
- Drink a couple of cups of coffee
- Drink coffee and then take a nap. The combined effect is better than either alone.

The best treatment for sleepiness is sleep

Simple measures such as opening the vehicle's window or turning up the volume of the radio give only short term benefit and should only be used until a safe parking place is reached.

All drivers who fall asleep at the wheel have a degree of warning.

There is no excuse for falling asleep at the wheel and it is not an excuse in law.

Medical Conditions causing sleepiness

Although all drivers are subject to the pressures of modern life, many drivers are unaware that some medical conditions also cause excessive sleepiness, which alone or in combination with the factors mentioned previously, maybe sufficient to make driving unsafe. A road traffic accident maybe the first clear indication of such a sleep disorder.

Even if a medical condition is the cause of falling asleep at the wheel, it is not an excuse in law.



Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA)

Facts about Obstructive Sleep Apnoea

- OSA is the commonest sleep related medical disorder
- OSA significantly increases the risk of traffic accidents.
- OSA occurs most commonly, but not exclusively, in overweight individuals.
- Partners often complain about snoring and notice that the sufferers have breathing pauses during sleep.
- OSA sufferers rarely wake from sleep feeling fully refreshed and tend to fall asleep easily when relaxing.
- Long distance lorry and bus drivers affected by OSA are of great concern as most will be driving on monotonous roads/motorways and the size or nature of the vehicle gives little room for error.
- Estimates suggest at least four in every hundred men have OSA.
- Age can be a factor, sleep problems arising more commonly in older people.



Management of OSA

- Lifestyle changes i.e. weight loss or cutting back on alcohol.
- The most widely effective treatment for OSA is continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). This requires the patient to wear a soft face mask during sleep to regulate breathing. Many patients find that this treatment enables them to have a good night's sleep, so reducing daytime sleepiness and improving concentration.

Once the diagnosis of OSA has been confirmed and the symptoms controlled, lorry and bus licensing as well as car-licensing are normally permitted with CPAP. See website www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org for more information.

Other sleep related conditions

Illnesses of the **nervous system**, such as **Parkinson's disease, MS, MND** may also cause excessive sleepiness. Although sometimes these illnesses alone may cause drivers to be unfit for driving. Tiredness or excessive sleepiness can be a non-specific symptom of Parkinson's disease, MS, MND or may also be related to prescribed medication.

Narcolepsy also causes daytime sleepiness as well as other symptoms that may be disabling for drivers.

What if I have a Medical Condition causing sleepiness during the day?

- You need to inform DVLA if you hold a current driving licence of any type.
- You can post, fax, email or telephone your notification.
- A third party notification will only be accepted in writing and the letter must be signed.

After a notification is received, a questionnaire will be sent to obtain specific details about your medical condition. The questionnaire also enables you to provide your consent for the DVLA Medical Advisers to request medical information from your doctors. Medical questionnaires may also be downloaded from the “medical rules for drivers” section of www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

It may take some time to complete our enquiries. You are therefore urged to seek specific advice from your doctors or specialists about whether or not you should drive in the meantime.

Once the medical adviser is satisfied that all the relevant medical information has been made available and they are able to complete their investigation, a decision will be made about your driving licence as quickly as possible. In some instances when a licence is issued it will be subject to more frequent renewals which are free of charge.

Contact us

Website: www.direct.gov.uk/motoring

Tel: 0870 600 0301

(8.15am. to 4.30pm. Mon – Fri)

Write: Drivers Medical Group, DVLA,
Swansea SA99 1TU

E.mail: eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk

Fax: 0845 8500095