



Understanding Fatigue

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One of the leading causes of truck accidents, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, is truck driver fatigue. According to the agency, 13% of truck drivers involved in crashes are fatigued. Fatigue can result from inadequate sleep, lengthy hours of work, physical or mental exertion that harms performance, or strenuous activities. The National Sleep Foundation recommends healthy adult sleep 7-9 hours per day, yet 30% of adults report they get less than six hours. In fact, commercial vehicle drivers average less than five hours of sleep per night. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates drowsy driving causes at least 100,000 police-reported crashes and kills more than 1,550 Americans yearly.

Lack of sleep mimics blood alcohol concentration levels. For instance, 18 hours without sleep is equivalent to a blood alcohol concentration level of 0.05%. Just like drunk, drugged or distracted driving, drowsy driving is a real public health issue. When you drive without adequate sleep, your motor skills are seriously impaired. In fact, drivers who've only slept 3 to 5 hours in the last 24 hours are unfit to drive. Most people understand it's risky, but don't consider the consequences.

Signs of fatigue may include headaches or dizziness; difficulty keeping eyes open; frequent yawning; muscle weakness; lack of energy; and frequent repositioning in seat. You may also experience microsleeps, lack of concentration, reduced short-term memory, increased errors, slower reaction times, impaired decision-making and judgement (including being unaware of being fatigued) and reduced immune system functions.

Longer-term the impact of fatigue can include: high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, anxiety, diabetes and gastro-intestinal disorders.

So, what can you do to ensure you are better rested when you report for duty? According to the National Sleep Foundation:

- Eat your meals at consistent times.
- Exercise regularly for a deeper sleep. Aim for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.
- Spend time in bright light during the day, natural light or equivalent brightness.
- Avoid heavy meals, nicotine, caffeine and alcohol before bedtime.
- Use a consistent routine with a relaxing wind-down to help get the sleep you need each night (7–9 hours for most adults, with consistent sleep and wake times.)
- Put your electronic devices away an hour before bed and sleep in a quiet, cool, and dark environment

What you can do to stay alert while driving

- **Take naps:** Your best bet is to get enough sleep daily. If you must stay up late, afternoon naps are a great way to catch up on sleep. A 15-minute nap can be very effective if you feel drowsy while driving. Make sure to pull over in a safe place.
- **Caffeine:** Avoid caffeine during the last half of your workday, as it may contribute to sleeping problems. You can gain short-term alertness by drinking coffee or other caffeine sources if driving, but it usually takes 30 minutes to take effect and wears off after a few hours.
- **Regular stops:** You should stop every 100 miles or 2 hours. Switch drivers if you can.
- **AC MAX Recirculation:** Do not operate the vehicle for extended periods with the AC on MAX or Recirculation. Under these conditions, the level of CO₂ in the vehicle increases, contributing to drowsy driving.
- **Tricks that do not work:** Opening the window, turning on the air conditioning, or playing loud music is ineffective in keeping drivers alert for extended periods.