



# Driver fatigue

**Fatigue doesn't just affect us when we travel long distances, it can also be a problem on the drive home from work, or even first thing in the morning if you've had an interrupted night's sleep.**

## What is fatigue?

Fatigue simply means being tired, sleepy or exhausted.

It severely impairs judgement and affects everyone in the same way.

One of the most dangerous symptoms of fatigue is not realising how tired you are.

While symptoms vary, they can include:

- poor concentration
- tired or sore eyes
- yawning
- drowsiness
- delayed reactions
- boredom or daydreaming
- memory lapses
- difficulty performing a task – like staying in your traffic lane
- micro-sleeps – falling asleep for a short time, without even knowing you've dozed off.

We often hear about driver fatigue, but many of us don't understand what it is or how it affects us.

## Fatigue and road crashes

Did you know that fatigue increases the chances of a crash being fatal from 3 in 1000 to 1 in 100?

It's believed that driver fatigue contributes to as many as 35% of fatal crashes.

This figure may even be as high as 50% in fatal single-vehicle crashes. Being awake for 17 hours has the

same effect on your driving as a BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) of 0.05, doubling your risk of crashing. After 24 hours your risk of crashing is a staggering seven times higher, which is like driving with a BAC of 0.1.

## Factors contributing to fatigue

The two main factors contributing to fatigue are:

- prolonged or repeated sleep loss
- being awake when you're normally asleep.

While the optimal amount of sleep an adult needs in a 24-hour period varies from person to person, 8 hours is considered to be the average requirement.

## Driver fatigue: who's affected and when?

Fatigue affects everyone and can strike at any time.

However, you increase your chances of experiencing driver fatigue when you:

- start a long trip after a full day at work
- drive for extended periods without taking any regular breaks
- drive when you'd normally be asleep
- drive after drinking alcohol
- drive in poor conditions, such as heavy rain, intense sunlight, heavy traffic, or on single-lane country roads.

We all tend to feel weary during the evening and early hours of the morning (from 10pm – 6am) and in the early afternoon (from 1pm – 3pm). Research shows we're at a higher risk of crashing during these times.



### **Avoiding fatigue on long trips**

Australia is a huge country with long distances between major towns and cities. Even if you're familiar with the roads you travel on, or you're experienced at long distance driving, you can still suffer from driver fatigue.

Even on the best-planned trips, the decision to take a short break is often left up to a hungry passenger or the needle on the fuel gauge nudging empty.

**Take a 15 minute break at least once every two hours, even if you're not tired.**

When you take a break, get out of the car and stretch, have a drink of water and enjoy the fresh air.

Don't wait until the next town or petrol station, and make use of the regularly spaced parking bays and rest areas along most major roads.

This is especially important if you're travelling long distances on your own and can't share the drive.

Other tips to avoid fatigue include:

- packing the car the night before a long trip
- getting a good night's sleep before heading off
- driving no more than 8-10 hours a day
- planning regular breaks and taking them
- making sure fresh air is continually circulating inside the car
- avoiding driving at night
- sharing the drive
- avoiding alcohol or drugs
- knowing if any medication you're on can make you drowsy – check with your doctor if you're not sure.

### **Overcoming fatigue**

There are many myths on how to overcome fatigue, but the only proven cure is sleep.

While power naps can be helpful, you really need to give your body a decent rest, and this can only be achieved by a long, uninterrupted sleep.

### **We're here to help**

Call our Road Safety team on 8202 4570  
or email [roadsafety@raa.com.au](mailto:roadsafety@raa.com.au)  
[raa.com.au/roadsafety](http://raa.com.au/roadsafety)