



FATIGUE

THE HIDDEN KILLER

This brochure was originally made for the Australian Transport Safety Bureau
and was adapted for local use by PDO CSM/5

THE PROBLEM

Driver fatigue, or tiredness, contributes to many deaths and injuries on our roads every year. It has a role in up to 30 per cent of fatal crashes and up to 15 per cent of serious injuries needing to go to hospital.

Driver fatigue can be just as deadly as excessive speeding or reckless driving.

The problem with fatigue is that it slowly develops and drivers often don't realise they're too tired to drive safely. But drivers can teach themselves to recognise the warning signs and take a break before it is too late.



THE WARNING SIGNS

There are a number of easy to recognise warning signs when you're becoming fatigued. It's a good idea to get to know what these are.

You know you are becoming fatigued if you have a combination of any of the following:

- ▶ You keep yawning
- ▶ You have difficulty keeping your head up or eyes open
- ▶ Your eyes feel sore or heavy
- ▶ Your vision starts to blur or dim
- ▶ You start 'seeing things'
- ▶ You find you're daydreaming, thinking of everything else but not your driving
- ▶ You become impatient and make rash decisions
- ▶ You feel hungry or thirsty
- ▶ Your hands feel sweaty
- ▶ Your reactions seem slow
- ▶ You feel stiff or cramped
- ▶ Your driving speed creeps up or down
- ▶ You start making poor gear changes
- ▶ You wander over the centre-line, or into another lane or on to the road edge
- ▶ You hear a droning or humming in your ears
- ▶ You don't notice a vehicle until it suddenly overtakes you
- ▶ You don't remember driving the last few kilometres.

When you notice some of the warning signs, it doesn't help your safety to brush them off as nothing. It is safer to take a break, sooner rather than later.

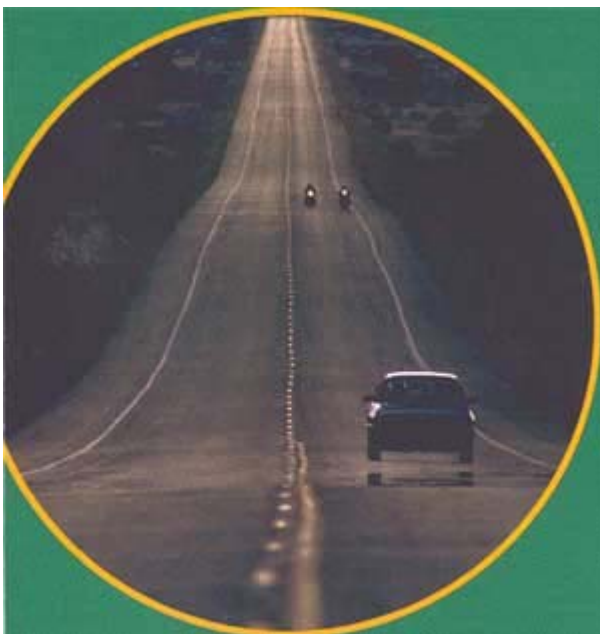
AVOIDING FATIGUE ON LONG TRIPS

There are a number of simple commonsense ways of avoiding driver fatigue. It's a good idea to get to know them. Using them will help you arrive safely.

- ▶ Plan your trip with a good night's sleep (that is, 7 to 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep) beforehand.
- ▶ Plan not to travel for more than 8-10 hours in anyone day. The longer you drive the more you must fight fatigue.
- ▶ Plan to take regular breaks (at least every 2 hours for 15 minutes or more), stopping in towns along the way or at roadside rest stops.
- ▶ Plan to start your trip early in the day and try as much as possible not to drive into the night. The chances of crashing are much higher at night. Camels and other animals are very difficult to see at night.
- ▶ Plan to stay somewhere overnight so you can arrive alive -even if it is the next day.
- ▶ When you stop, get out of the car and walk around for a while -exercise, breathing deeply.

- ▶ Share the driving, if you can. Passengers can tell you if you are looking tired or showing signs of tiredness.
- ▶ Eat proper well-balanced meals on journeys - not too much and not too little - and at your usual meal times. This will also ensure you take proper breaks. (It's a good idea to steer clear of fatty foods which can make you feel sluggish).
- ▶ Alcohol and driving do not mix. Alcohol is against the law. Alcohol will make you feel tired more quickly. Alcohol reduces your reaction capabilities. Alcohol is a killer on the road.
- ▶ Check what prescription medicines you are taking -some can affect your alertness or cause drowsiness. If this is the case, check with your pharmacist to see if you can stop taking them for a day.

Once fatigue sets in, there is little you can do about it except stop as soon as possible and take a break.



MYTHS AND FACTS

There are many myths about driver fatigue:

Myth: It'll be safer if I make the trip overnight because I'll avoid the day-time traffic.

Fact: Your body has a normal 24-hour rhythm pattern built into it. If you are driving when you would normally be sleeping you will be fighting yourself to stay awake. The chances of falling asleep at the wheel after your normal bedtime, especially in the early hours of the morning, are very high.

Myth: It's a good idea to start the trip after work.

Fact: This is the worst time to begin your trip. You've been using your mental and physical energies all day and you will be tired already, even though you don't realise it. The safest thing to do is to get a good night's sleep (about 7 to 8 hours of undisturbed sleep) and start your journey the next morning.

Myth: Loud music will keep me awake.

Fact: This might help for a while but it won't help for long, loud music might also distract you from the driving task or even send you to sleep.

Myth: A flask of coffee or a caffeine drink will keep me awake.

Fact: Caffeine is only a short term solution and will have less and less affect the more often you use it. It might make you feel more alert but it won't keep you going for long. The long term solution is to get some sleep.

Myth: Plenty of fresh air through the window will keep me awake.

Fact: This might give you a boost and help for while, as might turning the air-conditioning on to cold. But if you're tired, sleep is the only solution.

URBAN DRIVING FATIGUE

Fatigue is not just a problem for people taking long trips. Any driver can suffer from fatigue even on short trips.

Broken sleep or too little sleep at night, sleep disorders (such as sleep apnea, insomnia and narcolepsy), continuing pressures of stress, very demanding physical or mental work, shift work, caring for children and often the demands of daily living can all drain your energies. So, even before you get into the car, you can be tired. You need to judge if you are too tired to drive.

A cup of coffee, tea, cola or caffeine drink are practical short term options, but the effects don't last for long. Winding down the window or turning on the cold air-conditioning can act like a jolt to your system - but it won't last for long. Loud music can distract from the job of driving as well as keeping you awake for the short term.

Really, a friend, a taxi or bus could be the safest option.



If you have any further questions on this or any road safety topic please contact the PDO corporate road safety advisors in CSM: tel 67-8759/7956/5080.