

Safety Bulletin

Focus on Safety: Six Fatigue-Fighting Tips to Keep You Alert

It's after midnight, and the road ahead is clear. You know you can make up some time. Yet you also start to feel a little drowsy. Your best bet: find a safe place to pull over and rest.

Driver fatigue is a serious safety issue nationwide. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that nearly 4,000 people die in large truck crashes each year, and driver fatigue is a leading factor.

"When you become drowsy, your judgment can be delayed, which affects reaction time," says Chuck Pagesy, director of safety at Penske Truck Leasing. It's a real concern that affects both long-haul and short-haul drivers.



Groups such as the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recommend the following tips to help you fight fatigue:

1. **Know the signs of drowsiness** – If your eyes are heavy, you're yawning frequently or your vision is blurry, find a safe place to pull over and rest.
2. **Get enough sleep** – It may seem simple, but getting the right amount of sleep (seven-to-nine hours a night as per the National Sleep Foundation) isn't always easy. If possible, don't drive during times your body is naturally drowsy (midnight-6 a.m. or 2-4 p.m.). Also, be extra aware during the first hour of driving after sleep. That's when the risk for an incident is higher.
3. **Follow hours-of-service (HOS) regulations** – They include criteria for FMCSA-mandated rest breaks that help to ensure you rest properly between shifts. Also, if possible, take a nap when you feel drowsy. Short naps are proven to restore energy levels better than coffee.
4. **Get checked for sleep apnea** – A University of Pennsylvania study found that 28 percent of commercial truck drivers have mild to severe sleep apnea, which means you experience pauses in breathing while you sleep. People with sleep apnea often don't get restful sleep, which means they are drowsier during the day. Your doctor can help you learn your risk and ways to combat sleep apnea.
5. **Watch your medications** – Over-the-counter sleeping pills, allergy medicines, cold medicines and tranquilizers can make you drowsy. If you have a doubt, read the label. If you must drive with a cold, it's safer to suffer the cold than drive under the effects of medication that could make you drowsy.
6. **Don't rely on 'tricks'** – While smoking, turning up the radio, drinking coffee or opening up a window may provide a very short boost, they are not real cures for drowsiness.

Additional source: <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/safety/driver-safety/cm-v-driving-tips-driver-fatigue>



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