



Be awake to
the dangers of
driving tired.



GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Driving tired can kill.

TOWARDS ZERO

**SPEED AND RED LIGHT
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What causes fatigue?

The main causes of fatigue are:

- Being awake more than 17 hours straight
- Working when you would normally be asleep
- Sleeping at unusual times
- Accumulated sleep loss
- Disturbed or poor sleep
- Working very long hours
- Having no time to recover from work
- Suffering medical sleep problems
- General health and lifestyle

After 17 hours awake, you're on your way to sleep.

After being awake more than 17 hours, the metabolic activity in your brain decreases. Particularly in those parts of the brain that control judgement, attention and visual function.

That's why, after 17 hours awake, your chances of being in a fatigue related crash actually DOUBLE.

For most people that simply means being behind the wheel of a car after 11 o'clock at night.

Seven and a half hours sleep is generally recognised as the average amount required. If you get less than this each night you will build up a 'sleep debt'. You may be OK for a couple of days, but it will catch up with you and you'll get to the point where

you will need a good night's sleep. Shift workers who have to switch from day to night shifts know the effects of irregular sleep patterns.

Try to stick to a regular sleep and waking routine on every day of the week. Losing two hours sleep each day for four days will make you nearly as tired as losing one whole night of sleep.

There is only one cure for fatigue. It's sleep.

Your brain knows when it's time to sleep.

Your brain is programmed to put your body to sleep at certain times of the day and you can't fight it.

In the mid afternoon and particularly in the early hours of the morning, your brain sends signals to your body to go to sleep.

Inside our brains is a group of 10,000 nerve cells that program us to respond to night and day. Our body temperature is programmed to drop at night and make us feel sleepy and rise during the day to help us feel alert. At night time our digestive system slows and our hormone production rises to repair our bodies. The hormone melatonin helps set our body clocks; it increases at night and makes us want to sleep.

That's why fatigue crashes are four times more likely to happen between 10pm and 6am - your brain has decided you should be asleep.

You cannot reverse your body clock, although regular night shift workers can find ways to deal

with the impact of working when their brain says it's time to sleep. For further information, refer to the 'Staying Alert at the Wheel' brochure at www.ors.wa.gov.au

The effects of being tired when driving.

Most of us go without sleep for extended periods from time to time. You may be a student putting in an all-nighter of study before driving to uni. You may work unusual hours or you may go to a nightclub with friends until the early hours of the morning. Driving after such periods of sleeplessness can be highly dangerous.

If you are driving with a 'sleep debt' you will be less alert and attentive to what's going on around you.

You won't respond so well to an emergency situation and you may miss spotting dangers in advance.

If you are feeling drowsy you may drift in and out of sleep occasionally without knowing it. Sleep experts call this a 'micro sleep'. It's a brief nap that lasts only three to five seconds; but it can be fatal when driving and is a common cause of road crashes where the driver runs off the road. Such crashes are usually the most serious because the driver does not brake before hitting, say, the gravel, a tree or another car.

It's not just when you are driving long distances

that you may be at risk. If you have worked a long day, night shift or been up late and you haven't been getting enough sleep, you could tune out for a fatal few seconds on your journey home, even if it's a short distance. Driving after 17 hours of being awake is equivalent to driving with a BAC of 0.05.

Fatigue signals.

If you feel tired before you set out, it is probably a good indication that you should not be driving. Try to make alternative arrangements for your journey.

Drowsiness can creep up on you when you are driving. So look for the following danger signs:

Fatigue danger signs:

- **You have wandering, disconnected thoughts**
- **You find that you can't remember driving the last few kilometres**
- **You miss a gear**
- **You miss a road sign or your exit**
- **You find you have slowed unintentionally**
- **You brake too late**
- **You begin to blink**
- **You can't stop yawning**
- **You have trouble keeping your head up**
- **Your eyes close for a moment or go out of focus**
- **You drift over the centre line or onto the side of the road**

Avoiding driver fatigue.

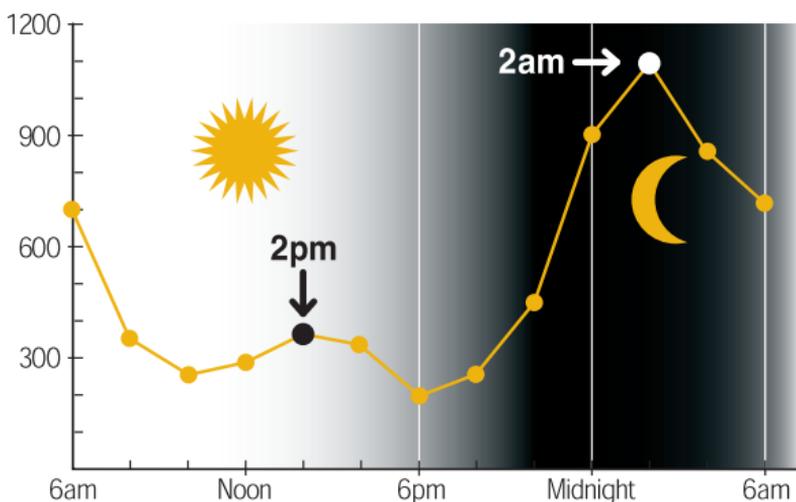
Once fatigue has set in, the only real solution is sleep. Research shows that most people benefit from just a twenty minute nap. Or you could have a coffee or change drivers.

Fatigue danger zone.

You will feel most sleepy between 1 and 5am, and between 1 and 4pm. These are high danger times for drivers.

Road crash numbers show this is true. Although there are fewer drivers on the road between midnight and 6am, statistics show they are much more likely to have a crash. (Some estimates suggest 20 times more likely.) Because your 'body clock' also turns down alertness after lunch (the siesta period), there is also an increase in road crash rates at this time.

Number of fatigue related crashes.



The likelihood of falling asleep when the body clock is set to its 'sleep' function is very much higher than at other times in the day. So try to plan your travel so you are not driving at these times and if you feel like a short nap and can take one – then do so.

Fatigue affects your brain before it affects your body.

It's a fact, the early signs of fatigue are mental, not physical.

First, your brain starts to tune out.

You drive, but can't remember what you've seen. You forget to change gears.

Physical signs like yawning and closing your eyes come later. Far too late if you're driving.

When you're experiencing the early mental signs, you are already in the fatigue danger zone and you're at risk.

So, why is this happening and when are you most at risk? It has a lot to do with your brain and the way it is programmed.

For more information:

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