

# Driver Safety Letter

presented by



## Driver Fatigue

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Commercial drivers are involved in more than 4,000 fatal crashes each year and more than 13% of those are due to fatigue and other physical issues, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Unfortunately, these numbers are deteriorating. According to FMCSA, there were 13.0 fatal large truck crashes per million people in the U.S. in 2017, a 23% increase from 10.6 in 2010.

Fatigue is the result of physical or mental exertion that impairs performance. Driver fatigue may be due to a lack of adequate sleep, extended work hours, strenuous work or non-work activities, or a combination of other factors. A recent study conducted on the sleeping and driving habits of CMV drivers concluded that an unhealthy lifestyle, long working hours, and sleeping problems were the main causes of drivers falling asleep while driving.

Below are some tips from FMCSA that will help you stay healthy and well rested during all your trips.

**Get Enough Sleep Before Getting Behind the Wheel.** Be sure to get an adequate amount of sleep each night. If possible, do not drive while your body is naturally drowsy. Every individual has a natural wake/sleep cycle that their body goes through each day and night. The cycle involves our internal clock and controls the daily pattern of alertness in a human body. With inadequate sleep, the drowsiness experienced during natural "lulls" can be even stronger and may have a greater adverse effect on a driver's performance and alertness.

**Maintain a Healthy Diet.** Skipping meals or eating at irregular times may lead to fatigue and/or food cravings. Also, going to bed with an empty stomach or immediately after a heavy meal can interfere with sleep. A light snack before bed may help you achieve more restful sleep. Remember that if you are not well-rested, induced fatigue may cause slow reaction time, reduced attention, memory lapses, lack of awareness, mood changes, and reduced judgment ability.

**Take a Nap.** If possible, you should take a nap when feeling drowsy or less alert. Naps should last a minimum of 10 minutes, but ideally a nap should last up to 45 minutes. Allow at least 15 minutes after waking to fully recover before starting to drive. Short naps have proven to be more effective at restoring energy levels than coffee.

**Avoid Medication That May Induce Drowsiness.** Avoid medications that may make you drowsy if you plan to get behind the wheel. Most drowsiness-inducing medications include a warning label indicating that you should not operate vehicles or machinery during use. Some of the most common medicines that may make you drowsy are: tranquilizers, sleeping pills, allergy medicines and cold medicines. It is safer to suffer from the cold than drive under the effects of the medicine. In a recent study, 17% of CMV drivers were reported as having "over-the-counter drug use" at the time of a crash.

**Recognize the Signals and Dangers of Drowsiness.** Pay attention to indicators of drowsiness. These include: frequent yawning, heavy eyes, and blurred vision. Research has indicated that being awake for 18 hours is comparable to having a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 percent, which is legally intoxicated and leaves you at equal risk for a crash.

**Do Not Rely on "Alertness Tricks" to Keep You Awake.** Behaviors such as smoking, turning up the radio, drinking coffee, opening the window, and other "alertness tricks" are not real cures for drowsiness and may give you a false sense of security. In fact, excessive intake of caffeine can cause insomnia, headaches, irritability, and nervousness. Also, it takes several minutes for caffeine to get into your system and deliver the energy boost you need, so if you are already tired when you first drink a caffeinated drink, it may not take effect as quickly as you might expect. In addition, if you are a regular caffeine user, the effect may be much smaller.

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