

# DRIVER FATIGUE

DRIVE  
WELL RESTED

Québec 



# DRIVER FATIGUE

STARTS LONG  
BEFORE YOU BEGIN  
NODDING OFF...

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**DRIVER FATIGUE IS ONE OF THE LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH ON QUÉBEC ROADS. EVERY YEAR, DRIVER FATIGUE IS A FACTOR IN OVER 1 IN 5 ACCIDENTS CAUSING DEATH OR INJURY.**

Just like alcohol, fatigue reduces a person's ability to drive. It affects concentration, judgment and reflexes, but also memory, mood, and the way drivers process information from their environment.

Reduced alertness can lead to driving errors and accidents, long before the driver nods off or falls asleep at the wheel.

# ARE YOU AT RISK OF HAVING AN ACCIDENT DUE TO FATIGUE?

ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

## 1 Am I getting enough sleep?

Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night. When we don't get enough sleep, we accumulate a sleep debt. The only way to eliminate a sleep debt is to get enough sleep.

## 2 How long have I been awake?

Even if you have had a good night's sleep, after being awake for a certain number of hours, fatigue sets in. Laboratory studies<sup>1</sup> have compared the effects of long periods of wakefulness to the effects of alcohol:

**17 HOURS OF WAKEFULNESS** ▶ **BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION 0.05**

**24 HOURS OF WAKEFULNESS** ▶ **BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION 0.10**

<sup>1</sup> Dawson and Reid, 1997. Williamson and Feyer, 2000.

### **3 Do I drive at the right time of day?**

Fatigue-related accidents often happen at night after midnight, early in the morning, or early to mid-afternoon, because of our internal clock. The human body is programmed to sleep at night and, ideally, we should take a nap in the early to mid-afternoon.

### **4 Do I have problems sleeping?**

Sleep disorders, such as insomnia and sleep apnea, impair a person's ability to drive when left untreated. See a doctor if you often feel tired during the day, if your sleep is not restorative, or if you have trouble sleeping at night.

### **5 Have I consumed alcohol, medication or other drugs?**

These substances can increase the effects of fatigue. Ask your pharmacist about the side-effects of any medication you are taking, even over-the-counter medication.

# PREVENTING FATIGUE ON A DAILY BASIS

## MAKE SLEEP A PRIORITY!

It is important to get **enough** sleep, but also to sleep **well!**

Here are a few tips for getting enough quality sleep:

- > Exercise regularly, but not too close to bedtime.
- > Eat well (avoid too much fat, salt and sugar; eat plenty of fruits and vegetables).
- > Limit your consumption of caffeine, energy drinks, alcohol and medication.
- > Take time to relax, and adopt good sleeping habits:
  - Develop a bedtime routine to prepare for sleep (read a few pages, take a bath, etc.).
  - Go to bed and get up at regular hours (avoid large differences between weekdays and weekends).
  - Make the bedroom off-limits to phones, televisions, computers, etc.

# PLAN YOUR TRIPS

Pay attention to your level of fatigue, and ask yourself if you really have to drive:

- › When possible, walk, cycle, use public transportation, take a taxi, or use a drive-home service.
- › Beware of late nights out! Consider sleeping over.
- › Never drink or take drugs before driving, and beware of medication that can cause drowsiness.

**DRIVER FATIGUE PUTS YOU AT RISK EVEN ON SHORT TRIPS IN WELL-KNOWN ENVIRONMENTS.**

If you are taking a long trip:

- › Make sure you are well rested before you leave.
- › Alternate between drivers.
- › When planning your trip, take into consideration the times of day when you are more likely to feel tired: at night and early to mid-afternoon.
- › Plan for breaks every two hours to stretch your legs. Regular breaks will help you stay attentive and concentrated.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands on a steering wheel, wearing a grey sweater. The background is dark, showing the interior of a car.

## ON THE ROAD, CONTROL THE FACTORS THAT CAN AFFECT YOUR ALERTNESS

- › Slow down: driving at higher speeds forces you to process a large amount of information quickly. Over time, this can lead to fatigue.
- › Avoid visual fatigue: when you drive, dim dashboard lighting and remove objects from the top of the dashboard.
- › Eat light meals.
- › Stay hydrated by drinking regularly.
- › Keep the passenger compartment cool and well ventilated.
- › Be wary of monotonous roads such as highways, as they can increase the risk of drowsiness.



**PAY ATTENTION  
TO THE SIGNS  
OF FATIGUE  
AND STOP BEFORE  
IT'S TOO LATE.**

## **RESPECT YOUR LIMITS**

Drivers who are tired tend to overestimate their level of alertness, jeopardizing their own safety and the safety of others. Drivers aren't always aware that they are falling asleep, and it sometimes happens very quickly.

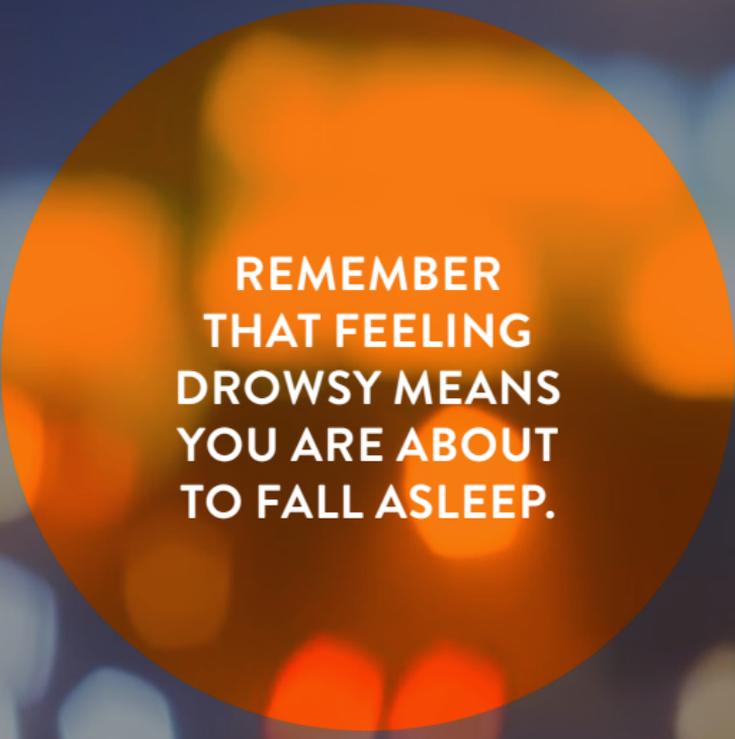
When you go to bed, are you aware of the precise moment when you fall asleep?

This is also true on the road!

# THE SIGNS OF FATIGUE ARE EASY TO RECOGNIZE

**When these signs appear, your ability to drive is already affected:**

- › You are having difficulty concentrating, and remaining vigilant and attentive (you have missed an exit or have stopped looking in the rearview mirrors).
- › Your reactions are slower (you brake at the last minute before an obstacle).
- › You are having memory lapses (you can't remember the last few kilometres driven).
- › You feel irritable, aggressive or agitated (you can't find a comfortable position).
- › Your thoughts are disjointed, confused.
- › You are having trouble interpreting your environment (you see shadows on the road that aren't really there, or you feel as though you are driving with blinders on).
- › You are having problems maintaining a steady speed and keeping your vehicle on a straight course (you change lanes unintentionally: if you are driving on the rumble strips, danger is imminent!).
- › You yawn often.
- › Your eyes are itchy.
- › You are having trouble keeping your eyes open.



REMEMBER  
THAT FEELING  
DROWSY MEANS  
YOU ARE ABOUT  
TO FALL ASLEEP.

# THE ONLY WAY TO STOP FATIGUE IS TO PULL OVER TO REST

## What to do?

Stop in a safe place and take a nap for 15 to 30 minutes. Drink coffee, ideally before you take a nap, as it may take 20 minutes for the coffee to take effect. Before getting back on the road, do a few stretches or walk around your vehicle to ensure that you are well awake.

A nap cannot replace a good night's sleep, but in cases of serious fatigue, it can help you safely continue your trip for a few hours. Keep in mind that the consequences of an accident caused by fatigue are often serious.

## Tricks

Driver fatigue is not something you can control. You cannot simply decide to be less tired. The only remedy for fatigue is sleep. **Rolling down the window, turning up the radio or any other trick will not work. The signs of fatigue will quickly reappear.**

If you feel the need to resort to one of these tricks, it means that you should have already pulled over to rest.

## Where to stop?

You can stop in a parking lot, a Village-relais\* or any other accessible area other than the shoulder of the road. In addition to being prohibited on a highway, parking on the shoulder is unsafe as there is a risk of collision with other vehicles.

\*Municipality recognized by the Ministère des Transports du Québec that offers a pleasant and safe stopping place: [villages-relais.qc.ca](http://villages-relais.qc.ca).

# MYTHS

***I'm young, so I can function well on little sleep.***

## FACTS

- › Adolescents and young adults actually need more sleep than the average adult population. They are more affected by a lack of sleep than their elder counterparts, but they often tend to overestimate their abilities.
- › Different biological and social factors make young drivers especially at risk for being involved in traffic accidents related to fatigue.

***I'm an experienced driver with good reflexes. I'm able to react quickly, so fatigue doesn't really have an effect on the way that I drive.***

## FACTS

- › Fatigue is a biologically determined state that neither willpower, nor experience, nor motivation can overcome or compensate for.
- › Its effects interfere significantly with driver performance, regardless of driving experience.

***Over the past years, I've gotten used to sleeping fewer hours. My body is used to it.***

## **FACTS**

- › Most people require 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night.
- › Our bodies do not get used to lack of sleep, even in the long term.
- › The accumulation of a sleep debt can have harmful impacts on your ability to drive and general state of health.

***I'm not going far, so fatigue is not a risk.***

## **FACTS**

- › Although it is true that longer trips can exacerbate fatigue, short trips are by no means exempt from the risks related to fatigue.
- › If you are impaired by fatigue, you are at risk as soon as you get behind the wheel.

# DRIVER FATIGUE

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WELL RESTED

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[saaq.gouv.qc.ca/en/road-safety/  
behaviours/fatigue](http://saaq.gouv.qc.ca/en/road-safety/behaviours/fatigue)

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Avec vous,  
au cœur de votre sécurité