

## Fatigue

### What is fatigue?

Strictly speaking, there are two states we typically call fatigue. The first type of fatigue is a kind of physical and mental tiredness or exhaustion that comes from spending a long time 'on task'. The second type of fatigue is drowsiness. Drowsiness is the first stage of the sleep/wakefulness cycle. Drivers who allow themselves to drive in either of these states are seriously impaired.

### Why is fatigue different from alcohol?

Although the adverse effects on a driver's performance are similar, crashes caused by alcohol and fatigue are in a way quite different. Most drivers can make a choice about whether to have alcohol at a restaurant. However, often drivers have no choice about how sleepy they feel driving home from that same restaurant. In other words, fatigue is something that can creep up on a driver unless they take serious precautions, before they start to drive.

### What are the facts?

It has been estimated that around 40% of all serious and fatal crashes have driver fatigue as a significant causal factor. It's also normal to think that driver fatigue is something that happens after many hours of driving, perhaps in the country. This is also not true. Many fatigue crashes happen in the city and on relatively short trips.

### What about a power nap?

The single biggest mistake that drivers make when it comes to managing fatigue is to believe that it's safe to drive until you become fatigued, and then rest. This is a very dangerous strategy. Because fatigue impairs judgement and decision making, waiting until your judgment is impaired before deciding to rest, is a sure way to increase your risk of crashing.

Power naps have been advertised as a way to combat fatigue. While it is true that drivers should stop and rest if they feel fatigued, taking a power nap when already fatigued is not the best way to manage fatigue.

### What is a microsleep?

A microsleep is not a power nap. A microsleep is a short period of sleep that lasts only moments. The most important facts about microsleeps are that they happen with the eyes open and typically there is no memory of the sleep. The most likely people to suffer from microsleeps are those of us who are not getting enough quality sleep. A major factor leading to microsleeps are sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea. It has been estimated that around 25% of Australians may suffer from undiagnosed sleep disorders.

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