

Fit to drive

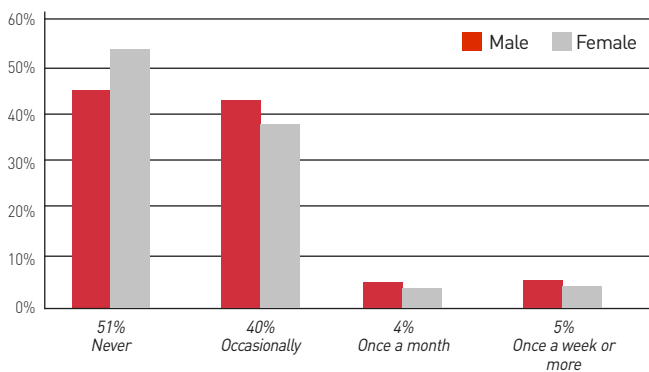
DRIVER TIREDNESS

Q1: How often do you drive after getting less than five hours' sleep the night before?

Doctors recommend we get eight hours' sleep a night to keep our bodies and minds refreshed and alert. This is critical for safe driving. However, almost half of drivers (49%) admit to having driven after less than five hours' sleep. This is more common among men (55%) than women (45%).

- 5% of drivers said they drive after less than five hours' sleep once a week or more – 6% of men and 4% of women
- 4% of drivers said they drive after less than five hours' sleep once a month – 5% of men and 4% of women
- 40% of drivers said they occasionally drive after less than five hours' sleep – 44% of men and 37% of women
- 51% of drivers said they never drive after less than five hours' sleep – 45% of men and 55% of women

Figure 1: How often do you drive after getting less than five hours' sleep the night before?



THE FACTS: DRIVER TIREDNESS

- At least 300 people are killed each year as a result of drivers falling asleep at the wheel¹, although the actual figure could be higher as it can be difficult to prove when a crash was caused by tiredness. These are often serious, high speed crashes because the driver does not brake²
- Drivers trying to fight off sleep often experience 'microsleeps', nodding off for two to 30 seconds, often without realising or remembering it. This is more than enough to cause a fatal crash: a driver experiencing a six-second microsleep at 70mph on a motorway would travel 200m in that time. Simulator studies have shown a clear relationship between 'microsleeps' and crashes³
- At-work drivers are particularly at risk from tiredness, because they typically spend much longer hours at the wheel. About four in ten tiredness-related crashes involve someone driving a commercial vehicle⁴
- If you cause a death while driving tired, you can be charged with causing death by dangerous driving. The maximum penalty is 14 years in prison

Q2: Have you ever fallen asleep at the wheel?

Falling asleep at the wheel can have disastrous consequences, and a shocking 7% of drivers admit having done so. This is much more common among men (14%) than women (2%).

- 1% said they fall asleep at the wheel occasionally – these were all men (2%)
- 6% said they have fallen asleep at the wheel once – 11% of men and 2% of women
- 93% said they have never fallen asleep at the wheel – 88% of men and 97% of women

ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: PREVENTING TIREDNESS

- Always have a good night's sleep before any journey. If you drive when tired, it is impossible to stop yourself eventually nodding off at the wheel⁵
- Winding down the window or turning up the radio does not prevent sleep. If you feel tired you should stop in a safe place as soon as possible; the government recommends drivers take a break at least every two hours
- If you wake up in the morning feeling exhausted, struggle to stay awake, snore or wake up struggling to breathe, you may suffer from a relatively common condition called sleep apnoea. Sufferers are at a significantly increased risk of crashing⁶ However, the condition is fully treatable, so if you experience symptoms, stop driving immediately and see a doctor
- Drivers are recommended to take breaks of at least 15 minutes at least every two hours to help stay alert, although if they feel tired in between they should stop somewhere safe as soon as they can. Professional truck and coach drivers have their working hours controlled by law, and are required to take breaks totalling at least 45 minutes in eight-and-a-half hours driving, followed by a break of at least 30 minutes: an average of almost 10 minutes' rest for every hour driving



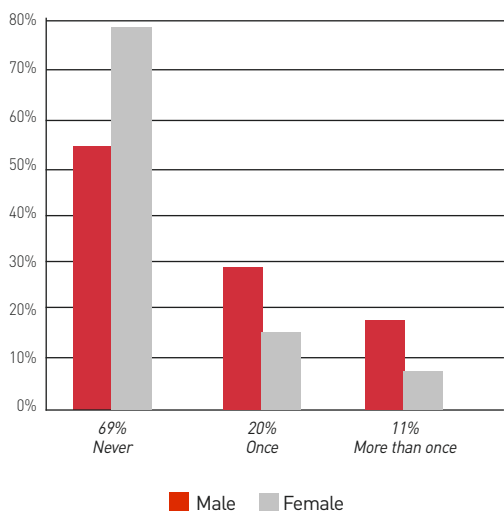
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Q3: Have you ever 'head nodded' at the wheel?

Although a relatively small proportion of drivers admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel, far more (31%) admit having 'head nodded'. This actually constitutes a 'micro-sleep' and reflects the fact that often drivers who head nod don't realise they have been asleep. This is much more common among men (45%) than women (22%). Nodding off for even a fraction of a second is enough to cause a fatal crash.

- 11% said they have 'head nodded' at the wheel more than once – 17% of men and 7% of women
- 20% said they have 'head nodded' at the wheel once – 28% of men and 15% of women
- 69% said they have never 'head nodded' at the wheel – 55% of men and 78% of women

Figure 2: Have you ever 'head nodded' at the wheel?



End notes

1. Loughborough University Sleep Research Centre, www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/hu/groups/sleep
2. Department for Transport, www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk
3. Golz, M. et al. 2011. 'Microsleep Episodes and Related Crashes During Overnight Driving Simulations'; http://drivingassessment.uiowa.edu/sites/default/files/DA2011/Papers/007_GolzSommer.pdf
4. Department for Transport, www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk
5. Horne, J & Reyner, L. 1995. 'Sleep Related Vehicle Accidents'; *British Medical Journal*
6. Sleep Apnoea Trust, www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org

