

Fit to drive

TIREDMESS AND LONG JOURNEYS

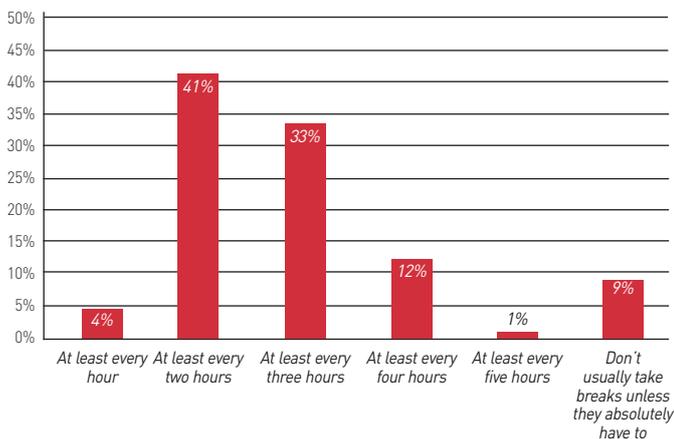
Q1: On average, how often do you take a rest break from driving when on long journeys?

More than half of drivers (55%) are ignoring basic advice to take rest breaks at least every two hours on long journeys, while one in ten (9%) don't stop at all unless they absolutely have to.

Among all drivers:

- 4% said at least every hour
- 41% said at least every two hours
- 33% said at least every three hours
- 12% said at least every four hours
- 1% said at least every five hours
- 9% said they don't usually take breaks unless they absolutely have to

Figure 1: How often do you take a rest break from driving on long journeys?



Q2: What is the longest you have driven without taking a rest break?

A huge proportion of drivers admit to dangerously lengthy stints at the wheel without breaks. Almost four in 10 (39%) say they have driven for four hours or more non-stop. Men are far more likely to have done this than women, and nearly five times as likely to have driven for six hours or more non-stop.

Among all drivers:

- 6% said one hour or less
- 22% said two hours
- 33% said three hours
- 23% said four hours
- 9% said five hours
- 7% said six hours or more

Men vs women:

- 1% of men and 9% of women said one hour or less
- 12% of men and 30% of women said two hours
- 36% of men and 31% of women said three hours
- 25% of men and 21% of women said four hours
- 11% of men and 7% of women said five hours
- 14% of men and 3% of women said six hours or more

THE FACTS: DRIVER TIREDNESS

Driver tiredness causes one in five deaths on major UK roads.¹ Crashes caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel typically involve vehicles running off the road or into the back of another vehicle. They tend to be high-speed crashes, because drivers do not brake before crashing, so the risk of death or serious injury occurring is greater than in other types of crashes.²

Too little sleep radically affects your ability to drive safely and after five hours' sleep you only have a one in ten chance of staying fully awake on a lengthy journey.³

Research shows that normal sleep does not occur without warning. You should know when you are starting to feel sleepy.³ Warning signs include: increased difficulty concentrating; yawning; heavy eyelids; eyes starting to 'roll'; and neck muscles relaxing, making the head droop.

Q3: What do you do if you do feel sleepy when driving on long journeys?

A horrifying one in three drivers (35%) admit sometimes pushing on if they feel sleepy at the wheel, ignoring advice to stop as soon as possible, with 10% saying this is their usual approach.

Among all drivers:

- 66% always stop as soon as possible at the next safe place and take a break
- 25% often stop, but sometimes try to push through the tiredness by opening a window, switching on the radio or some other method
- 8% occasionally stop, but mostly try to push through the tiredness by opening a window, switching on the radio or some other method
- 2% always push on and keep themselves awake by opening a window, switching on the radio or some other method

LOST LIVES

Mark, 32, from Norfolk, was just ten minutes away from home in April 2008, travelling back after visiting friends in Hertfordshire. The driver behind Mark watched him drive steadily for around a mile and then saw his car drift across the road. As Mark swerved to return to the correct side of the road he drove into a 40 tonne vehicle driving in the opposite direction. He died instantly.

Barry Love, step father of Mark, said: "I have driven a lot for work so was aware of the effect that tiredness can have when driving, but Mark's death really brought this home. It is awful to think that something so easily avoidable took Mark away from us, and caused such pain and devastation to our family. The issue of driver fatigue needs far more public awareness, as tiredness can come on very quickly. If you notice any signs of tiredness before setting off, please rethink whether the journey is essential, or if you're already driving, take a rest as soon as you possibly can."

Fit to drive

Q4: Do you always get at least seven hours' sleep before a long driving journey?

The majority of drivers (55%) admit not always getting a full seven hours' sleep the night before a long journey, leaving themselves at risk of falling asleep.

Among all drivers:

- 45% said yes
- 55% said no

ADVICE FOR DRIVERS: TIREDNESS

Get plenty of sleep before a journey, plan your journey to include time for adequate rest and don't set out if you are already tired. Take rest breaks at least every two hours for a minimum of 15 minutes.

If you feel tired when driving, listen to the warning signs straight away and stop for a break somewhere safe as soon as you can. Sleep ensues faster than you think – trying to fight off sleep by opening the window or listening to the radio puts you at risk of 'microsleeps', when you nod off for two to 30 seconds without remembering it. Microsleeps can be fatal: at 70mph a driver travels 200m in six seconds. However, fatigue can affect your ability to drive safely long before microsleeps occur.⁵

If you start to feel sleepy while driving stop for at least a 15 minute break somewhere safe. If you drink caffeine, drink two cups of coffee or preferably a high-caffeine energy drink, then take a 10-15 minute snooze. By the time you wake up any caffeine will have kicked in and you may feel alert enough to continue your journey. If you still feel tired, or you still have a long way to go, you should stay put and try to find somewhere to get a good night's sleep. Caffeine is a temporary drug and its effects do not last long. Sleep is the only long-term cure to tiredness.

End notes

1. THINK! Department for Transport
2. THINK! Department for Transport
3. Awareness of sleepiness when driving', University of Loughborough, 2003
4. Awareness of sleepiness when driving', University of Loughborough, 2003
5. Fatigue and Road Safety: A Critical Analysis of Recent Evidence, Department for Transport, 2011

