

People who wouldn't dream of drinking and driving often do something that can be just as dangerous. They don't recognize how deadly it can be to get behind the wheel when they are tired.

Fatigue can affect the human body in many of the same ways as alcohol or drugs. And this means that drowsy driving can be extremely irresponsible. Drivers owe a duty to others on the road to act reasonably, including being aware of their surroundings, following the law, and reacting appropriately to conditions. When drivers fail to meet their obligation, whether due to fatigue or another cause, they can be held liable for [car accidents](#) and the [injuries](#) that result.

How Fatigue Affects the Body

Obviously, if a driver falls asleep at the wheel, the consequences can be catastrophic. But staying awake is not the only issue. A driver who is awake but sleepy or worn out is likely to cause an accident for several reasons. Fatigue has some dangerous effects. This includes:

- Reduced reaction time
- Reduced coordination
- Difficulty focusing and paying attention to tasks
- Impairment of judgement abilities
- Delayed decision-making
- Reduced vigilance

In addition, fatigue can affect a driver's ability to see clearly and judge distance accurately. A drowsy driver may follow too closely behind other vehicles and have difficulty maintaining a speed that's appropriate for conditions. That makes them more likely to rear-end the vehicle in front of them.

If a hazard appears, a fatigued driver will take longer to notice it, recognize the danger, assess an appropriate response, and take evasive action. During the extra time it takes to complete these critical steps, the vehicle

continues to move forward, making it nearly impossible to avoid a collision.

According to the [National Sleep Foundation](#), studies show many similarities between drowsy driving and drunk driving. After study participants had been awake for 20 hours straight, their reaction time, hand-eye coordination, and ability to multitask and remain focused were impaired just as badly as if they had a blood alcohol content of .08%. In other words, someone who gets up for work at 6 a.m. and stays up until two in the morning will be driving with many of the same impairments as someone who is legally intoxicated. And it gets worse the longer they go without sleep.

The Problem is Prevalent

The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control](#) reports that well over 30 percent of U.S. adults get less than 7 hours of sleep per night, and in some areas, the percentage of sleep-deprived adults exceeds 45 percent. Moreover, 12 percent of the adult population sleeps less than five hours per night.

A study conducted by the [Foundation for Traffic Safety](#) found that drivers who slept between five and six hours each night were nearly twice as likely to be involved in a crash. In addition, the study showed that drivers had serious difficulty if they hadn't slept well the night before. Drivers who got 2-3 hours less sleep than usual had a crash rate three times higher than those who slept their usual amount of time.

Although the initial focus of research centered on the dangers of drowsy driving among [commercial truck drivers](#), it became apparent that other drivers also pose a risk. The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) reports that a survey found 11 percent of drivers had fallen asleep behind the wheel. In another study, over 17 percent of drivers admitted that, in the previous month, they had driven when they were too tired to keep their eyes open. This does not count drivers who were afraid to admit the truth. Even worse, it does not include drivers who suffered enough from fatigue to be impaired, even though they did not actually nod off while driving.

Studies show that drowsy driving is a problem at all times of day, even for drivers making short trips. It is important for others on the road, including pedestrians and bicyclists, to be aware that the vehicles around them may be operated by drivers who are not prepared to react to their presence in time to avoid an accident due to fatigue.

Drowsy Driving from a Legal Perspective

There are clear laws that prohibit driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. For drivers who are drunk, the blood alcohol content can be measured and compared with statutory limits.

The guidelines are not as clear regarding drowsy driving. Drivers are expected to operate their vehicles with reasonable care, and fatigue may prevent them from doing so. They can be held liable when they fail to live up to the obligation they owe to others, and that failure causes injuries in a collision. This is known in legal terms as negligence.

It takes considerable evidence and persuasive legal reasoning to prove that another driver's negligence was the cause of your injuries. For the best chance of success, it is important to start collecting and preserving evidence as soon as possible after the accident. This could include photos of skid marks and vehicle damage, witness accounts, and footage from traffic cameras.

It can be difficult to focus on gathering evidence and building a case for legal liability while you're struggling with injuries. And the task of protecting your legal rights becomes even more difficult when insurance company representatives start pestering you to answer questions and make statements. They are looking for ways to trick you into saying something that allows them to shift liability onto your shoulders.

Working with an experienced attorney early on after an accident can help you in many ways. Your attorney can handle questions on your behalf, allowing you to focus on healing and reducing your worry about [making a mistake](#). And your legal team can start acquiring evidence to build your best case for compensation.

If a Drowsy Driver Caused an Accident, Find Out Your Rights

At [Martin & Jones](#), we've seen the devastation that can occur when someone drives while fatigued. We urge all drivers to find an alternative mode of transportation if they are sleep-deprived or feeling drowsy.

If you've been hurt in a car accident caused by a fatigued driver or any other situation where someone's negligent conduct caused your injuries, we invite you to schedule a free consultation with our team to learn more about your options for recovery. To get started, [contact us online](#) or call 800-662-1234.