



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Stay Awake Behind the Wheel*

Drowsy Driving Prevention Week — November 6-13, 2016

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Moore] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm Dr. Latitia Moore, filling in for your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Being a safe driver requires complete focus on the road and the cars around you. Unfortunately, many people get behind the wheel when they've had a long day at work or haven't gotten enough sleep.

Dr. Anne Wheaton is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the dangers of drowsy driving. Welcome to the show, Anne

[Dr. Wheaton] Thank you.

[Dr. Moore] Anne, how many motor-vehicle crashes are related to drowsy or sleepy drivers?

[Dr. Wheaton] Drowsy driving is a major problem on our roads. Each year, drowsy driving causes more than 100,000 crashes that result in injuries. Drowsy driving also contributes to one out of five fatal crashes, those are crashes when someone actually dies, and that's more than 6,000 lives lost each year to drowsy driving.

[Dr. Moore] Is it more common among any particular age group?

[Dr. Wheaton] Although you can find drowsy drivers of all ages, it's even more of a problem among young drivers, drivers in their teens or in their twenties. More than two-thirds of high school students get less than the recommended eight hours of sleep on school nights and, when you combine this lack of sleep with a lack of experience behind the wheel, that's a recipe for drowsy driving crashes.

[Dr. Moore] What are some of the causes of drowsy driving?

[Dr. Wheaton] The main cause of drowsy driving is simply not getting enough sleep. This could be because you don't make the time in your schedule to get the sleep you need, but it could be because of things you have less control over, such as school schedules for teens or work schedules for adults, maybe you work the night shift or have multiple jobs that cut into your sleep time. But it's not just a matter of getting enough sleep. Poor quality sleep can impact how alert you are. So even if you sleep seven or eight hours a night, but have a sleep disorder, like sleep apnea, you could end up dozing off behind the wheel. And when you're driving can make a difference, too. Even with enough good quality sleep, you're more likely to feel sleepy when you're driving late at night. And finally, alcohol and some medications can make you sleepy and impair your ability to drive.

[Dr. Moore] So, how can we prevent drowsy driving?

[Dr. Wheaton] The first thing is to get enough sleep and practice good sleep habits, but also, avoid driving late at night or very early in the morning when your body is telling you that you should be in

bed. And seek treatment for sleep disorders, such as sleep apnea, avoid alcohol and other sedatives before driving, and also learn to recognize the signs of sleepiness.

[Dr. Moore] What are the signs that you might be too tired to drive?

[Dr. Wheaton] First of all, people are terrible judges of how sleepy they are. By the time you notice that you may have a problem, you've probably already experienced what's often called a micro sleep, and that's when you actually fall asleep for a short period of time, and that can be less than a second up to half a minute. And that may not seem like a big deal but when you're behind the wheel of car, but that could be the difference between life and death. But some of the signs that you can look for are frequent yawning or blinking, you're struggling to keep your eyes open, having trouble remembering the past few miles that you drove, missing turns or exits, and drifting from your lane or hitting a rumble strip, and that's what rumble strips are for—to warn you that you're going off the road.

[Dr. Moore] What should a person do if they are exhibiting the signs of drowsy driving?

[Dr. Wheaton] The best thing to do is to pull over and take a nap, so try to find a safe spot where you can take a short nap—as little as 15 minutes. If you're not alone, change drivers but *only* if the other person isn't sleepy, too. And caffeine can also help. Just keep in mind that caffeine needs a little time to take effect so, if you can, drink a cup of coffee and take a short nap and when you wake up from your nap, the caffeine's kicking in. There are a few things that people try that don't work so don't count on these things, things such as turning up the radio, rolling down the window, exercising, chewing gum, they may all sound good but they don't help you prevent drowsy driving.

[Dr. Moore] Where can listeners get more information about drowsy driving?

[Dr. Wheaton] Listeners can go to [cdc.gov/sleep](http://cdc.gov/sleep).

[Dr. Moore] Thanks, Anne. Going to bed early can help improve your chances of getting enough sleep. If you're nodding off at the wheel, pull over and take a brief 15-minute nap. Better to be a little late to your destination than to not arrive at all.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Latitia Moore for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.