

# Driving and Sleep Disorders

**Objective:** An overview of common sleep disorders and their effects on driving ability

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At least 100,000 crashes reported each year are directly related to driver fatigue, and about 15% of all heavy truck crashes cite fatigue as a factor.

Drowsy driving can be caused by many factors, such as not getting enough hours of sleep, the effects of drugs or alcohol, or shift work. Another possible cause of excessive fatigue could be a sleep disorder, such as sleep apnea, insomnia, or narcolepsy.

In the United States, it is estimated that 70 million people suffer from sleep disorders. Commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers have a higher-than-average risk.

## Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a condition caused by many short interruptions in breathing at night, preventing restorative sleep. It often goes undiagnosed. Sleep apnea is associated with conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, and heart attack or stroke.

- People with untreated obstructive sleep apnea are up to 7 times more likely to fall asleep while driving and experience other fatigue symptoms, such as poor concentration, low alertness, and slow reaction speed.
- Almost 1/3 of CMV drivers have mild-to-severe sleep apnea.
- A person with sleep apnea can still operate a CMV if their sleep apnea is successfully treated and under control.

## Insomnia

Insomnia is a condition where a person has problems falling asleep or staying asleep. Getting enough hours of sleep is important: the lack of sleep results in fatigue, low energy, and drowsiness, which can affect driving ability.

**Warning:** Certain over-the-counter and prescription drugs to treat insomnia can impair your alertness the next morning, so be cautious when using them.

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## Narcolepsy

Narcolepsy is a condition that may cause irresistible and persistent tiredness during the day and difficulty maintaining and controlling their level of alertness. This is sometimes combined with “attacks” of sudden muscle weakness or unintentional periods of sleep.

- Severity of symptoms varies among individuals. People with mild symptoms may only experience mild sleepiness, usually relieved by a short nap.
- Overall, studies suggest that people with narcolepsy have 3 or 4 times the risk of being involved in a crash while driving.
- Driving long distances, especially on the highway, can be especially dangerous due to the increased difficulty of paying attention and maintaining alertness over long periods of time in these circumstances.
- If narcolepsy is well controlled by medication, many people can still drive safely, but a doctor’s letter may be required to get a driver’s license.
- The FMCSA recommends disqualifying a CMV driver with a diagnosis of narcolepsy, regardless of how well it is brought under control.

## If You Think You Have a Sleep Disorder

- Consult your physician about diagnosis and treatment options.
- Check with your carrier or local DMV for more information: every state has its own medical standards and qualifications for certification to operate a commercial motor vehicle.

## Driving and Sleep Disorders

This form documents that the training specified above was presented to the listed participants. By signing below, each participant acknowledges receiving this training.

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Trainer: \_\_\_\_\_ Trainer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Class Participants:

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