Headline: Sleep deprivation doubles crash risk

Deckhead: AAA Foundation study reveals the dangers of drowsy driving

Not getting a good night’s sleep can be a rude awakening for drivers.

Motorists who miss between one to two hours of the recommended seven hours of sleep in a 24-hour period nearly double their risk for a crash, according to research from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

The Centers for Disease Contral and Prevention reports that 35% of U.S. drivers sleep less than the recommended seven hours daily. Drowsy drivers are involved in more than one in five fatal crashes on U.S. roadways each year. AAA warns drivers that getting less than seven hours sleep may have deadly consequences.

“You cannot miss sleep and still expect to be able to safely function behind the wheel,” said Dr. David Yang, executive director for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. “Our new research shows that a driver who has slept for less than five hours has a crash risk comparable to someone driving drunk.”

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety’s report reveals that drivers missing 2-3 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period more than quadrupled their risk of a crash compared to drivers getting the recommended seven hours of sleep. This is the same crash risk the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration associates with driving over the legal limit for alcohol.

The AAA Foundation found that in a 24-hour period, crash risk for sleep-deprived drivers increased steadily when compared to drivers who slept the recommended seven hours more. Statistics show:

* Six to seven hours of sleep: 1.3 times the crash risk.
* Five to six hours of sleep: 1.9 times the crash risk.
* Four to five hours of sleep” 4.3 times the crash risk.
* Less than four hours of sleep: 11.5 times the crash risk.

Nearly 100% of drivers told the AAA Foundation they view drowsy driving as unacceptable behavior, but nearly one in three admit that at least in the past month, they drove when they were so tired they had a hard time keeping their eyes open.

“Managing a healthy work-life balance can be difficult and far too often we sacrifice our sleep as a result,” said Jake Nelson, director of Traffic Safety Advocacy and Research for AAA. “Failing to maintain a healthy sleep schedule could mean putting yourself or others on the road at risk.”

Symptoms of drowsy driving can include having trouble keeping eyes open, drifting from lanes and not remembering the last few miles. However, more than half of the drivers involved in fatigue-related crashes experienced no symptoms before falling asleep behind the wheel.

AAA urges drivers to *not* rely on their bodies to provide warning signs of fatigue and should instead prioritize getting plenty of sleep (at least seven hours) in their daily schedules. For longer trips, drivers should also:

* Travel at times when normally awake.
* Schedule a break every two hours or every 100 miles.
* Avoid heavy foods.
* Travel with an alert passenger and take turns driving.
* Avoid medications that cause drowsiness or other impairment.

The AAA Foundation report is based on the analysis of a representative sample of 7,234 drivers involved in 4,571 crashes. All data is from the NHTSA’s National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey, which comprised a representative sample of police-reported crashes that involved at least one vehicle that was towed from the scene and resulted in emergency-medical services being dispatched to the scene.

Cutline: TIRED ACT – Drivers getting fewer than seven hours of sleep are more likely to get into a car crash, according to a AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety survey. Image: Maksym. Adobe Stock.