



## Auto

### TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS TOP LIST OF DROWSY DRIVERS

You’ve seen the bumper sticker “Hang up and drive.” But for thousands of teens and young adults, the message just as easily could be “Wake up and drive.” Ironically, the youngest, strongest, healthiest drivers are also the most likely to nod off somewhere between “Drive” and “Park.”

According to researchers at the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), two-thirds of all drowsy-driving crashes involve people under age 30 – with males outnumbering females by five-to-one. Sleep deprivation is the likely cause.

Teens and 20-somethings miss out on sleep owing to a combination of sleep patterns (younger people naturally tend to be more alert late at night, meaning they often go to bed too late to get all the sleep they need on weekdays), schoolwork demands, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, and late-night socializing. The average high school senior sleeps just 6.9 hours on weeknights – far short of the optimal nine hours needed on weeknights by people that age, as recommended by the NSF.

That’s a sobering thought when you consider that, according to the NSF, being awake for 18 hours produces driving impairment equal to having a blood alcohol level of .05 (.08 is legally drunk)! Other groups at high risk for drowsy driving include night-shift workers, long-haul truckers, people with untreated sleep disorders, and those with chronic insomnia.

See the checklist below for clues that your teen may be sleep deprived. Also, be sure to check out other Consumer Tips on this Web site, including “*The dangers of teenage driving*,” for more information on keeping your teen safe behind the wheel.

#### CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS: IS YOUR TEEN AT RISK FOR A DROWSY DRIVING ACCIDENT?

Driver fatigue causes 100,000 accidents a year and kills more than 1,550 people, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. So how can you tell if your son or daughter is bleary-eyed enough to be a danger on the road? The NSF says to watch out if he or she:

- must be awakened for school or work (usually with difficulty)
- sleeps two or more hours later on weekends than on weeknights
- relies on caffeinated beverages in the morning to wake up or consumes two or more during the day
- naps more than 45 minutes regularly.

Good sleep habits (a regular bedtime, no TV or other electronics in the bedroom, and no caffeine after lunch) combined with learning to say “no” to sleep-robbing overcommitments can help reduce the risks.

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