



Smart Transport

# Road to Rested: The Ultimate Guide to Tackling Driver Fatigue and Ensuring Safe Journeys

*Dangers of driver fatigue as an HGV driver & how to mitigate the risks*

# Driving for a living can be a demanding & challenging job that requires a high level of alertness and attention to detail.

However, the long hours spent on the road, often during the night, can take a toll on drivers, leading to driver fatigue. Because of this, commercial drivers are involved in a disproportionately high number of fatigue-related accidents. In this article, we will explore the dangers of driving when tired for HGV drivers.

## What is driver fatigue?

Driver fatigue is a condition that arises from prolonged periods of driving without adequate rest or breaks. It is characterised by drowsiness, slower reaction times, impaired decision-making abilities, and poor concentration, all of which can lead to increased risks of accidents and injuries on the road.



### **Did You Know...**

A driver who nods off for just three or four seconds on a motorway would have covered the length of a football pitch with closed eyes.



According to the road safety charity 'Brake', 10 - 20% of all crashes are estimated to be caused by driver fatigue.

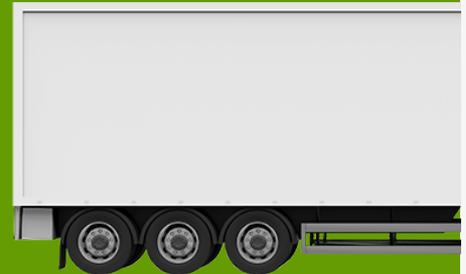


Did you know?

**Around 40%**

of sleep-related accidents involve commercial drivers

[www.rosipa.com/media/documents/road-safety/driver-fatigue-factsheet.pdf](http://www.rosipa.com/media/documents/road-safety/driver-fatigue-factsheet.pdf)



## Who is most at risk of driver fatigue?

Driver fatigue can affect anyone who is operating a vehicle for an extended period, but there are certain groups that may be more at risk. These include:

- 1 Commercial drivers**  
HGV drivers, bus drivers, and other professional drivers who spend long hours on the road are particularly susceptible to fatigue.
- 2 Shift workers**  
People who work long hours or irregular shifts, particularly those who work at night, may struggle to maintain alertness while driving.
- 3 Individuals with sleep disorders**  
People with sleep disorders such as sleep apnoea or insomnia may be more prone to fatigue while driving, even if they have had a full night's rest.

*How You Can Help*

# Strategies to prevent driver fatigue for commercial drivers



## 12 Step Guide

To prevent driver fatigue, commercial drivers can take the following steps:

### **1. Inform drivers of the risks of driving when tired**

Drivers need to be made aware of the warning signs that indicate fatigue, including yawning, heavy eyelids, drifting between lanes, difficulty focusing, and experiencing frequent microsleeps. They should understand that these symptoms indicate a critical need for rest and immediate action.

### **2. Get adequate rest**

Commercial drivers should ensure that they get enough rest before a long drive to ensure that they are alert and focused on the road.

### **3. Take regular breaks**

Taking regular breaks during long drives can help commercial drivers stay alert and focused on the road.

### **4. Engage in physical activity**

Engaging in physical activity before and during long drives can help increase blood flow and alertness.

### **5. Account for time required to drive home after a shift**

### **6. Review shift arrangements**

Night and rotating shifts can severely impact quality of sleep. Review shift arrangements to ensure your drivers sleep isn't impacted too frequently.

## 7. Avoid driving during the night

Driving during the night can disrupt a driver's circadian rhythms and increase the risk of driver fatigue. Try to avoid driving between midnight and 6am, when natural alertness is at a minimum.

## 8. Monitor for signs of driver fatigue

In-vehicle video technology has come a long way in the last couple of years. The latest in-cab cameras boast impressive AI technology that can monitor for and detect signs of fatigue by looking for changes to head position, gaze, eyelids, and the mouth. If signs of fatigue are detected, the driver is immediately alerted so they can take action to pull over and take a rest.



## 9. Drink a caffeinated beverage (at least 150mg of caffeine)

Caffeine can help to increase alertness and improves reaction time. However, caffeine is not a cure for driver fatigue and should not be used as a substitute for getting enough sleep.

## 10. Take a short nap (up to 15 mins)

Taking a short nap can improve driver fatigue. A short nap of 15-20 minutes can help to improve alertness and reaction time, which can help to reduce the risk of accidents. However, it is important to avoid taking a nap that is too long, as this can actually make fatigue worse.

## 11. Avoid taking medication that brings on drowsiness

Certain medications, such as antihistamines, sedatives, muscle relaxants, and some prescription drugs, can have a significant sedating effect on the body, leading to excessive drowsiness and impairing one's ability to drive safely.

## 12. Assess for sleep disorders/improve lifestyle:

It has been estimated that drivers with a sleeping disorder, such as sleep apnoea, are between 6 and 15 times more likely to have a road traffic accident. A recent study run by an Italian transport company found that due to the sedentary work and unhealthy lifestyle often associated with commercial driving, the majority of commercial drivers are at a greater risk of having a sleep disorder such as sleep apnoea. This risk can be reduced by ensuring drivers are within a healthy BMI and partake in regular exercise.

# What are the risks of driving while fatigued for commercial drivers?

Commercial drivers are at a higher risk of experiencing driver fatigue than other drivers due to the long hours they spend on the road and their irregular shift patterns.

***The risks associated with driver fatigue are even more significant for commercial drivers because of the size and weight of their vehicles.***

A fatigued commercial driver may have a slower reaction time, decreased awareness of their surroundings, and reduced decision-making abilities, all of which can lead to potential serious accidents and collisions.

Analysis of road traffic accidents has shown that driver fatigue is a contributory factor in up to 20% of road traffic accidents, and up to 25% of fatal and serious accidents. When a driver has fallen asleep at the wheel, they are unable to brake or swerve to avoid or reduce the impact, so the speed of impact in these collisions are much higher, sadly resulting in them being 50% more likely to result in death or serious injury.



## Overall Conclusion

Driver fatigue is a significant hazard for commercial drivers that can lead to severe accidents and injuries. By taking steps to prevent driver fatigue, such as getting adequate rest, taking regular breaks, and engaging in physical activity, commercial drivers can reduce the risks associated with driving while fatigued.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q** How long should HGV drivers take breaks during long drives?

**A** HGV drivers should take breaks every two hours or so during long drives.

**Q** Are there any legal restrictions on how long HGV drivers can drive without a break?

**A** In the UK, the legal restrictions on how long HGV drivers can drive without a break are as follows: HGV drivers are only allowed to drive for 9 hours in a day. HGV drivers must take a break after 4.5 hours of driving. This break must be at least 45 minutes long. HGV drivers must have a daily rest of at least 11 hours. This rest can be taken in one block or split into two blocks of at least 3 hours each. HGV drivers must have a weekly rest of at least 45 hours. This rest must be taken in one block and cannot be taken in the vehicle.

The regulations also state that HGV drivers must use a tachograph, which is a device that records the driver's driving time and breaks. Tachographs must be fitted to all HGVs that are over 3.5 tonnes in weight.

**Q** Are there any technological solutions available to prevent driver fatigue?

**A** Yes, there are technological solutions available to prevent driver fatigue for commercial drivers, including fatigue monitoring systems that can detect signs of fatigue and alert the driver to take a break.

**Q** What lifestyle changes can be made by commercial drivers to reduce driver fatigue?

**A** HGV drivers can make some lifestyle changes to reduce driver fatigue, including getting adequate sleep, maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and taking regular breaks during long journeys.

**Q** How can employers support commercial drivers in reducing driver fatigue?

**A** Employers can support commercial drivers in reducing driver fatigue by providing adequate rest periods, ensuring that work schedules allow for sufficient sleep, providing training on the dangers of driver fatigue, and encouraging drivers to report any fatigue-related issues.

**Q** What are the legal consequences of driving while fatigued for commercial drivers?

**A** Driving while fatigued can lead to serious legal consequences for commercial drivers, including fines, penalties, loss of license, and criminal charges if an accident occurs as a result of driver fatigue.



**Find out more about Driver Fatigue via [Brake.org.uk](https://www.brake.org.uk)**

[www.brake.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/mybrake/knowledge-centre/driver-fatigue](https://www.brake.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/mybrake/knowledge-centre/driver-fatigue)

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