



**driver management**

Driving a heavy vehicle for work or other purposes can be demanding. It is important to abide by relevant driver fatigue laws, regulations, guidelines and generally take care of your health, in the interest of public safety and your own wellbeing.

As a heavy vehicle driver, you can spend a lot of time on the road, and you can be responsible for heavy loads, dangerous goods and passengers. It is very important that you are in good health for your own safety and that of the public.

## Health of heavy vehicle drivers

Some important ways to stay healthy and keep on top of your driving are:

- get enough sleep
- eat a well-balanced diet
- exercise regularly
- try to relieve stress.

### Enough sleep

The need for sleep varies among individuals with some people needing more sleep than others. Where possible, try to get most of your sleep at night time – it can be better than daytime sleep. Regular and quality sleep (at least seven to eight hours) is one of the best ways to manage driver fatigue.

See the following pages in this section on managing driver fatigue and for information on the associated legal responsibilities.

### Diet and exercise

It is important to eat a well-balanced diet and do regular exercise to maintain overall good health. Ask your health professional for advice.

### Try to relieve stress

Stress affects your driving. If you are having problems at home or at work, you are up to five times more likely to be involved in a crash. Your GP can advise you on where to go for help.

## Driver fatigue

Driver fatigue is one of the biggest causes of crashes for heavy vehicle drivers. Many of these crashes occur late at night or early in the morning.

As a heavy vehicle driver, you need to understand what causes fatigue and how to pick up on the early warning signs so that you can do something about it before it affects your driving.

### Causes of fatigue

Fatigue can be caused by a number of factors, including:

#### Sleep factors

- Getting less sleep than you need.
- Getting less sleep than you need over a number of days.
- Trying to sleep during the day.

#### Time of day factors

- Driving when you should normally be asleep.
- Driving in the early hours of the morning.
- Night time driving.
- Driving in the early afternoon after a heavy lunch.
- Sleeping during the day when you would normally be awake.

### Physical factors

- Poor health and fitness.
- Emotional issues.
- Medical sleep problems.

### Other factors

- Long driving hours.
- Irregular hours and early starting times.
- Tight scheduling.
- Insufficient time to recover from previous driving hours.
- Doing physical work such as loading and unloading.
- Poor driving conditions such as hot or wet weather.
- Monotonous driving.

### Signs of driver fatigue

Driver fatigue severely impairs your concentration and judgement; it slows your reaction time. Watch for these early warning signs of driver fatigue:

- Yawning.
- Poor concentration.
- Tired or sore eyes.
- Restlessness.
- Drowsiness.
- Slow reactions.
- Boredom.

- Feeling irritable.
- Making fewer and larger steering corrections.
- Missing road signs and taking wrong turns.
- Having difficulty staying in the lane.
- Microsleeps (where you 'nod off' for a short time).

### Tips on managing driver fatigue

- Resting and sleeping are the two most important ways to combat fatigue. Have a good night's sleep before you start your trip and even have an afternoon nap before starting back on a night shift. You should also take rests early on in the trip before you start feeling fatigued.
- Plan your trip ahead of time to allow for rest breaks.
- Plan your rest breaks to happen before you start feeling fatigued or plan where to stop if you do start to feel fatigued. If you can, plan rest breaks for when your body clock will tell you to be asleep (afternoon, night/early morning) because that is when you are most likely to become fatigued.
- Try and have a regular sleep and waking schedule on every day of the week.
- Be aware of the causes and effects of fatigue and recognise the early warning signs. Make sure you stop and rest as soon as possible when you realise you are becoming fatigued. Do not try and push on, especially in those 'body clock' danger times of night/early morning and afternoon.

- Allow enough sleep to become completely refreshed.
- Look after your health and fitness with regular exercise and a healthy diet.
- Never drink alcohol before or during your trip.
- Never drive longer than the appropriate work and rest hours, or agree to a roster that is longer than the appropriate work and rest hours.

### Roadside rest areas

Rest areas are available 24 hours a day all year round and are clearly signposted. Service centres, petrol stations, parks and towns are other places you can stop and take a break from driving. Information on rest areas and truck parking bays in the Northern Territory can be found online at [nt.gov.au](http://nt.gov.au)

### Fatigue management regulation in the NT

The NT has adopted an outcome-based approach to managing driver fatigue. While the Northern Territory does not regulate driving hours under transport law, if you drive any vehicle (heavy or light) for commercial purposes there are requirements and responsibilities under NT Work Health and Safety law. Employers have an obligation to provide a safe workplace, which does not endanger workers or others. In addition to employers, everybody who has an influence on a driver's work schedule (including you) has a general duty of care to ensure driver fatigue risks are managed effectively.

The Northern Territory (NT) has developed a Road Transport Fatigue Management Code of Practice under the provisions of the *NT Workplace Health and Safety Act* (WH&S Act).

The Code of Practice provides guidance on how to meet duty of care obligations under the WH&S Act and lists guiding principles which should be considered in the development of a fatigue management system for drivers. The code focuses on safe outcomes as a result of appropriate risk assessment based on the task at hand, the flexibility to take appropriate rest, and the management of driver health issues.

More information relating to fatigue management in the NT, including the Code of Practice, and a resource package to assist operators with developing a fatigue management system is available from [nt.gov.au](http://nt.gov.au)

For more information on WH&S obligations, please visit the NT WorkSafe website at [worksafe.nt.gov.au](http://worksafe.nt.gov.au)

Operators complying with national regulations by adopting and complying with one of the National Heavy Driver Fatigue options of Standard Hours, or Basic or Advanced Fatigue Management; or the Western Australian fatigue management regulations will ensure they are meeting their WH&S obligations in NT.

## Fatigue management regulation in other jurisdictions

Other jurisdictions regulate heavy vehicle driver fatigue differently to NT. Some of the applicable rules are complex and offences can carry large penalties.

**Before driving a heavy vehicle in another state or territory, drivers must make themselves fully aware of their responsibilities under the relevant law.**

Western Australia has a combined Work Health and Safety, and transport law based fatigue management system for heavy vehicle drivers. There are specific driving hours and record keeping practices that must be complied with. Drivers of certain heavy vehicles must also participate in mandatory fatigue management accreditation. Contact Main Roads WA on 138 138, or at [mainroads.wa.gov.au](http://mainroads.wa.gov.au) for more information.

All other jurisdictions (QLD, NSW, ACT, VIC, SA and TAS) regulate heavy vehicle driver fatigue through the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL). Regulations under the HVNL prescribe maximum driving hours and record keeping via the National Driver Work Diary. The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator should be contacted on 1300 MYNHVR (1300 696 487) or at [nhvr.gov.au](http://nhvr.gov.au) for more information.

## Alcohol and heavy vehicle drivers

It is illegal to drive while under the influence of alcohol.

### Effects of alcohol on driving

Alcohol is a depressant and reduces your ability to drive safely.

- **Slower reaction time** to triggers requiring action (e.g. vehicle approaching from a side street, traffic lights changing or people crossing the road).
- **Poor judgement** about your speed and the speed of other vehicles and in judging distances (e.g. other vehicles might seem further away than they really are).
- **Observation skills, such as visual attention and hearing, are reduced.** After drinking alcohol, drivers tend to focus on the road straight ahead and ignore what is happening in their side vision (e.g. they won't hear or see things like vehicles approaching from side streets or people crossing the road).
- **Poor coordination** when trying to do more than one thing at a time, especially in an emergency.
- **Confidence up, judgement down**, leading you to believe you are OK to drive. You might take risks that you would not normally take. This can be extremely dangerous because you may not be aware how much your skills have deteriorated.

Alcohol can also:

- give you false confidence that leads to taking risks
- make it hard to do more than one thing at a time
- affect your sense of balance and coordination
- make you sleepy.

### Getting back to zero takes time

After a night of heavy drinking, it can take many hours for your blood/breath alcohol concentration (BAC/BrAC) level to get back to zero. Many people are charged with a drink driving offence the day after drinking.

Approximately 10% of the alcohol passes out of the body, unchanged, through breath, urine and sweat.

Most of the alcohol in the bloodstream (more than 90%) is broken down by the liver. As a general rule, it takes the liver about one hour to dispose of the alcohol in one standard drink. This means that the BAC/BrAC drops by about 0.015 per hour. While this amount differs from person to person, a BAC/BrAC of 0.05 will take approximately three to four hours to reach zero.

### What does not sober you up

There is nothing you can do to make the liver work any faster – only time will help you to sober up. Nothing can speed up this process. It is a myth that the following things will make a person more sober.

- A cup of black coffee.
- A cold shower.
- Fresh air.
- Mints or chewing gum.
- Milk.
- A short nap.
- Vomiting.

These things have no effect on your blood alcohol level. Once you have had a drink, you just have to wait it out.

Your BAC/BrAC must be 0.00% when you drive a:

- heavy vehicle with a GVM of more than 15 tonnes
- public passenger vehicle such as a bus or a coach
- vehicle which carries a dangerous load.

**Even one drink can put you over the legal limit. You need to take into account any drinks you have had. It takes at least an hour or more for the body to get rid of the alcohol from one standard drink.**

### Drugs and heavy vehicle drivers

It is illegal to drive while under the influence of drugs, including some over-the-counter and prescription medicines.

A drug is any chemical substance that alters the normal way that your body or mind works. Drugs not only affect your physical skills such as reaction times, coordination and vehicle control but also affect your mood, perception, information processing and risk taking behaviour. That is why drugs can make your driving worse and greatly increase your chance of having a crash.

How a drug will affect you depends on:

- the drug itself – type, amount, purity and method of use
- your weight, body size and health
- other drugs you have taken and the setting such as surroundings and work situation.

Whatever drug is used, it is important that you know how it affects you, the harm it can do and what it does to your body.

Generally heavy vehicle drivers who do take drugs take two types – stimulants to try and stay awake and depressants to try and go to sleep.

#### Stimulants

Stimulants (uppers) speed up messages between the brain and the body. They include medicines with mild stimulants like pseudoephedrine and illegal drugs like speed.

### The effect of stimulants on driving

Stimulants **do not** increase your driving ability or coordination, however, they can:

- give you a false sense of confidence
- increase your risk taking behaviour
- distort your visual perceptions making it difficult to judge distances
- make you feel exhausted because you cannot sleep which will affect your reflexes and your concentration
- increase your risk of having a crash.

As the effects of stimulants begin to wear off, you may experience a level of fatigue that is worse than when it was first taken.

The long-term health effects of taking stimulants include:

- anxiety
- chronic sleep problems
- compulsive repetition of actions
- depression
- extreme mood swings
- high blood pressure
- heart failure
- impotence
- irritability
- panic attacks or seizures

- paranoia
- weight problems.

A good sleep is the only way to prevent or cure fatigue. Taking stimulants to keep awake can make fatigue worse when the effect of the drug wears off.

### Depressants

Depressants slow your reflexes, impair your balance and coordination, affect your vision and perception of time and space, your memory and your ability to think logically. The 'hangover' effects such as drowsiness and poor coordination can last for several hours after the initial effects, which can mean you are not able to drive safely.

Depressants greatly increase the risk of having a crash when you are driving because you can have:

- slower reaction time
- distorted perception of speed and distance
- impaired vision
- reduced ability to concentrate
- impaired coordination.

### Prescription drugs

Some prescription medications can affect your driving. Read the instructions on the packaging or consult your doctor or pharmacist to find out if the medication you are taking would impair your driving ability.



## Drink and drug testing

### Roadside drink and drug testing

Police have the power to carry out roadside breath or saliva testing on any driver or rider in the NT. Specific Police testing operations will target heavy vehicle drivers.

### Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs

If the manner of your driving indicates that you are impaired by alcohol or drugs or you are involved in a crash, Police have the power to take you to hospital to obtain a blood and urine sample. The sample will be analysed for any substance, including some prescription drugs known to impair driving.

## Seatbelts

It is important for truck and bus drivers to wear a approved seatbelt. Any driver or passenger must wear a seatbelt properly adjusted and securely fastened wherever there is one fitted. If there is an empty seat with a seatbelt, a passenger must move to that seat.

**It is an offence to remove a fitted seatbelt from a vehicle, if you remove it you may be breached for not wearing it as well as for removing it.**

### The driver is responsible

Drivers are responsible for all passengers being properly restrained in a seatbelt or approved child restraint where seatbelts are fitted. There are fines and demerit points for a driver who is not wearing a seatbelt and who fails to ensure that passengers use seatbelts.

Children under seven years of age must be secured in an approved child restraint or booster seat when travelling in a vehicle. The type of restraint to be used also depends on the age of the child.

Passengers aged 16 years and over who do not use an available seatbelt will also be individually fined.

## Entering and exiting a vehicle

For safety there is a procedure for entering and exiting a heavy vehicle. Bus drivers also need to be aware of this procedure.

To enter the vehicle the driver must check for traffic before moving out from the line of the vehicle and again before opening the door. When entering the vehicle the driver must use available steps and grab handles to climb into the vehicle, maintaining three points of contact at all times.



To exit the vehicle the driver must check again for traffic before opening the door. When exiting the vehicle the driver must exit facing the vehicle using available steps and grabs (not jumping) while maintaining three points of contact.