

DRIVERS WITH SLEEP DISORDERS

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I- Goals

- A. Review studies of drivers with sleep disorders to answer several important questions about sleepy drivers.

II-Are sleep disorders and excessive sleepiness common?

- A. Sleep Apnea occurs in 24-9% of adult males and 9-4% adult females (ages 30-60). Less than 5% of these subjects with sleep apnea are aware of their condition ⁽¹⁾.
- B. Eight percent of a randomly selected group of working adults without sleep apnea are pathologically sleepy from other causes.
- C. Conclusion: Sleep disorders and sleepiness are common and unrecognized in adult drivers. These sleep disorders are more common than diabetes, seizure disorders, and alcoholism among drivers.

III-Do untreated sleep disorders adversely affect driving?

- A. Several studies using various driving simulators show that subjects with sleep apnea and narcolepsy perform poorer than controls ^(2, 3).
- B. One preliminary study suggests that subjects with sleep apnea or narcolepsy perform as poorly as legally intoxicated drivers.
- C. Conclusion: Subjects with untreated sleep apnea and narcolepsy are poor drivers and may drive as poorly as the dreaded, drunk driver.

IV-Does untreated sleep disorders affect auto crash rates?

- A. Studies from the United States and Canada show that auto crash rates are 2 or 3 times greater in untreated subjects with sleep apnea or narcolepsy ^(4, 5).
- B. These auto crashes may cause serious injury or death ⁽⁶⁾.
- C. Conclusion: Drivers with untreated sleep apnea or narcolepsy have a high automobile crash rate.

V-Does treatment of sleep disorders improve driving performance?

- A. Studies from United States and Europe show that successful treatment of sleep apnea and narcolepsy improve driving performance ^(2, 3, 7).
- B. Studies have shown a significant decrease in reported auto crashes in patients with sleep apnea successfully treated with nasal CPAP ^(8, 9).

- C. Conclusion: Successful treatment of sleep apnea or narcolepsy improves driving performance and may prevent many serious auto crashes.
- D. Recent reviews have suggested guidelines for physicians caring for drivers with sleep disorders ^(10, 11).

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