

# Sleepiness & Driving

Driver fatigue is one of the most common contributing factors in motor vehicle crashes in New Zealand. The more serious a crash is, the more likely driver fatigue was involved. In 2013 fatigue was identified as a contributing factor in 32 fatal crashes and 109 serious injury crashes. Many hundreds more crashes resulted in minor injuries and property damage only. In all the social cost to New Zealand was about \$274 million – around 9% of the social cost of all injury crashes.

Being tired affects driving by

- *slowing your reaction times*
- *making it difficult to concentrate*
- *reducing the ability to judge risks*

There are many reasons why a driver might be too fatigued to drive, such as:

- *Not getting enough sleep*
- *Taking medications which cause sleepiness (somnolence)*
- *Driving at times when we might normally be asleep*
- *Untreated conditions such as Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) or narcolepsy*

Holding a driver's license in New Zealand requires a number of criteria to be met, including being medically healthy to drive. It is important to know that if you hold a New Zealand driver's license **you are responsible for only driving when you are safe to do so – this means not driving if you are too tired.**

You may also be advised by your doctor not to drive if you are being investigated for a sleep disorder.

NZTA has produced a fatigue calculator and journey planner to make it easier to manage driver fatigue.

You can find this and other useful resources online at:

[www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/driving-safely/fatigue/overview.html](http://www.nzta.govt.nz/traffic/driving-safely/fatigue/overview.html)



# Frequently Asked Questions

## **“Who decides if I am safe to drive?”**

NZTA issues driver licences based on information it receives from a number of sources. Your family doctor holds responsibility for overseeing your overall health and managing medical conditions. They are in the best position to confirm your overall medical safety to drive to NZTA, and receive information from other health teams (such as our sleep service) to do so. All medical practitioners have a legal obligation to advise NZTA of relevant medical concerns they have around a particular patient. It's important to understand that only NZTA can issue or revoke a drivers licence – doctors, nurses, and physiologists do not have the power to remove or reinstate licences.

## **“But I’m a good driver and I never feel sleepy when I drive.”**

Sleepiness is a very subjective sensation – each of us experiences it differently. You may never feel sleepy when you are driving, but the law states that if you have a medical condition associated with increased risk of driver fatigue you will need to show you are either using treatment, or you are not at risk of falling asleep when you drive.

## **“What do I do to prove my OSA is not increasing my driver fatigue risk?”**

The NZTA may ask you to provide proof you are using your therapy. If you are using a CPAP or APAP machine the NZTA will require at an average use of at least 5 hours per night, and this use must be sustained for at least 6 weeks before you are considered adherent to therapy. You must continue to use your therapy in this way unless advised otherwise by your sleep doctor. Adherence may also be called “use” or “compliance”.

Alternatively you may be asked to provide proof you are not at risk of driver fatigue. If this is the case NZTA will specify what type of proof they need. Further testing for this purpose is not available through ADHBSleep, and will usually be at your own cost through a private provider.

**If you require a CPAP adherence (use) report please contact  
ADHBSleep Clinic for an appointment  
Direct dial phone number: 630 9860**

**ADHBSleep**

*Caring for adults with sleep disordered breathing*