



DON'T DIE FOR A DEADLINE



For further enquiries:



www.rta.nsw.gov.au



13 22 13
8.30am to 5pm Mon-Fri and 8.30am to 2pm Sat

A truck driver's guide to
THE DANGERS OF USING DRUGS TO STAY AWAKE

Drugs and driving

Some truck and bus drivers use prescription, over the counter and illegal drugs to combat fatigue. The danger for you as a driver if you take drugs is that it's difficult to predict and judge how the drug will affect your driving until it's too late. There is no quick fix for fatigue. The only true way to combat fatigue is to ensure you get enough sleep before and during your trip.

Drugs affect the normal way that your body and mind work. They not only affect your physical skills such as reaction times, co-ordination and vehicle control, but also affect your mood, perception, information processing and risk taking behaviour. Quite simply, your driving will suffer and your chance of having an accident will greatly increase.

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Drugs affect people differently

How a drug will affect you depends on a range of factors. This includes the drug itself (type, amount, purity and method of use) as well as your weight, body size and health. Other factors such as your surroundings and work situation will also affect how your body reacts. Whatever drug is used, it is important that you know how it affects you and the harm it can do to you.

There are generally two types of drugs heavy vehicle drivers use:

- Stimulants – to try and stay awake.
- Depressants – to assist in trying to get to sleep.





Stimulants

What are stimulants?

Stimulants are drugs that speed up the messages between the brain and the body. They include medicines with mild stimulants like pseudoephedrine and illegal drugs like 'speed'.

The danger of drugs such as speed and ecstasy is that they're made illegally in backyard laboratories so the purity, strength and the substances the drug is cut with are often unknown. They can even include dangerous chemicals, which cause side effects such as vomiting, dizziness, confusion and damage to the heart, lungs, liver and brain. As a user, you do not know whether these stimulants contain 5% or 50% pure ingredients – so the risk of unintentional overdose is heightened.

Every dose of stimulants increases your health problems. If you start taking drugs every time you drive, your body will need increased amounts to gain the same effect. The quantity you take can reach a stage where no further increase in the amount taken will produce the desired effect. The only effect on your body will be the increasingly dangerous side effects.

The effects of stimulants on your driving

- You can have a false sense of confidence.
- You can make rash decisions that can lead to increased risk taking behaviour.
- Your visual perceptions can be distorted, which will make it difficult to judge distances.
- Your driving ability and co-ordination will be lessened.
- With the lack of sleep, you will actually feel more exhausted, affecting your reflexes and concentration.
- The risk of crashing will be greatly increased.

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

The long-term health effects of taking stimulants:

- Impotence
- High blood pressure
- Heart failure
- Chronic sleep problems
- Extreme mood swings
- Compulsive repetition of actions
- Paranoia
- Anxiety/depression/irritability/suspiciousness
- Weight loss
- Panic attacks
- Seizures

Users sometimes take other drugs to cope with the undesirable effects of stimulants. This can lead to a 'roller coaster' dependence on a range of drugs. Some people might take stimulants to combat the effects of fatigue and then take depressants to help them sleep at night. This type of dependence can lead to a variety of serious physical and psychological problems.



Depressants

A depressant affects the central nervous system by slowing down the messages going between the brain and the body. This then slows down breathing and heart rate.

Depressants will slow your reflexes and impair your balance and coordination. They affect your vision and perception of time, as well as your ability to think logically. There are also dangerous 'hangover effects' such as drowsiness and poor coordination that can last for several hours. Drivers take their lives in their hands as their ability to operate safely on the road is reduced well after the initial effects of the drug have worn off.

The dangers of taking depressants

- Sleep disturbance
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite and consequent weight loss
- Nervousness, anxiety, sweating and upset stomach
- Body chills, increased body temperature and tremors
- Lower blood pressure
- Dependency

The effects of depressants on your driving

- They slow your reaction time
- They distort your perception of speed and distance
- They impair your vision
- They reduce your ability to concentrate
- They impair your ability to coordinate reactions when driving
- They greatly increase your risk of crashing while driving



The law and penalties for drug driving

In NSW, it is against the law to drive a car, motorcycle and/or a heavy vehicle while under the influence of drugs. Apart from illegal drugs, this also includes some over the counter medications and prescribed medications.

If you are found to be driving under the influence of drugs, you may be fined up to \$2,200, be imprisoned for up to 9 months and be automatically disqualified from driving for 12 months for a first offence. The penalties increase progressively for second and subsequent offences.

Tips for Safe Driving

Having a good sleep is the only way to prevent becoming fatigued or cure fatigue once you have it. Taking drugs to keep awake can make the fatigue worse when the effect of the drug wears off. See the RTA's fatigue information booklet for tips on how to avoid and manage your fatigue.

Some prescription medications can also affect your driving. Read the instructions on the medication packaging or consult your doctor or pharmacist to find out if the drugs you are taking will impact your driving ability. See the RTA brochure on prescription medication for more information.

Avoid driving if you:

- Have used drugs. Especially recent use and if large quantities were taken.
- Feel dizzy or light headed.
- Are unable to think clearly.
- Are nauseous or unwell.
- Feel drowsy or tired.

