

## Reach Your Long-Distance Destination Safely This Summer



by **Debbie Feldman**

**Y**ou're on summer vacation and you've been driving four hours straight, but you don't remember the last 10 miles.

Everyone else in the car is napping and you don't want to be next. How can you avoid joining your passengers in slumberland?

"Before leaving on a long trip, ask yourself, 'How healthy and capable am I of making this trip?'" says Jim Solomon, technical specialist in the National Safety Council's Public Safety Group. "Professional drivers are limited in the number of hours they are allowed to drive. Automobile drivers aren't." So use your best judgment when considering how long to drive.

Plan your trip by setting a limit on the amount of time you drive without a rest. "A trip of more than 10 to 12 hours should be broken into a two-day drive," says Mike Ezzell, director



of operations at the Texas Safety Association in Austin.

### **Avoid highway hypnosis**

Driver fatigue and drowsiness lead to lapses in your attention and to slower reaction times. You can fall asleep at the wheel without warning. If you're driving alone and you've been on the road for more than a few hours, you may already be beyond the point of needing rest.

"When you are drowsy, you can't count on caffeine, an open window, or a loud radio to keep you awake. Your body needs rest or sleep," says George Carmignani, a traffic safety consultant in Albuquerque, N.M. Instead, keep the following tips in mind when traveling long distances.

Stop and rest frequently. "We teach students in Defensive Driving that they should not drive for more than two hours without taking a break for 10-15 minutes," says Ezzell. If you're very tired, stop in a safe place and take a 20 to 45 minute nap.

If you're driving alone, make sure you get enough sleep the night before you leave home. Avoid alcohol, medications or herbs that may make you sleepy. Keep your car cool — roll down the windows or use the air conditioner. Read road signs out loud. Turn the radio on and listen to lively music or a talk show. Sing along with the music.



When you stop the car at a rest area, don't stay in the car. Get out, stretch and walk around. This increases circulation, wakes up your body and gives your brain oxygen. You can also get a snack, splash cold water on your face, or place a cool, damp cloth on the back of your neck. "Take some time from behind the wheel," says Solomon.

### Plan ahead

Of course you should plan ahead and never get to the point where you're tired and trying to find a place to stay. Set a limit on the number of miles you drive in one day. Stop for the night before you become tired. Get motel guides and call ahead for reservations. Make reaching the destination your goal, and stop even if you don't think you're tired — you may be more tired than you realize. Stop early enough to have your evening meal and rest before going to bed. That way you'll get a good night's sleep and be fresh the next morning. But avoid big meals while traveling. After a large meal, the impulse is to take a nap. Instead, eat light meals and healthy snacks.

Avoid eyestrain by wearing a good pair of sunglasses to cut glare. Staring straight ahead for long periods of time tires your eyes. Keep your eyes moving. Look at road signs. Glance from side to side now and then. Look at your mirrors every 3 to 5 seconds.



If you're traveling with passengers, switch driving duties every two hours or 100 miles. Drivers should talk to their passengers. The passengers' job is to keep the driver alert and look for signs that he or she is getting fatigued.

"Drivers who are drowsy will yawn frequently, drop their head down, close their eyes or drift from their lane," says Carmignani. If your driver gets to this point, make him or her stop to change drivers.

### Check it out

Before you even get on the road, prepare your car for the trip. Check the tires, belts, hoses, liquids, lights and brakes. Carry an emergency road kit that contains a first aid kit, three orange triangles, road flares or reflectors, a flashlight, blankets and a fire extinguisher. Be sure you have a gallon of water and coolant for your vehicle's radiator.

If your car becomes disabled, pull far off the roadway. A drowsy driver or one who is not paying attention can drive onto the shoulder and hit your car. Turn on your flashers and wait in the car. If you have a mobile phone, use it to call for help.

If you follow these tips, you'll arrive at your destination safe and sound knowing that you've not only protected yourself, but made the roads safer for all drivers. ●