

Expert says sleep is essential on road trips

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Road trips are a summer tradition for many families, but some are so focused on reaching their final destination that drivers tend to ignore their bodies' need for sleep. However, Baylor College of Medicine's Dr.

Philip Alapat explains the importance of getting enough sleep to ensure safe and fun road trips.

Alapat, assistant professor of medicine and an expert in [sleep disorders](#), said [sleep deprivation](#) can be an issue before people even pull out of the driveway.

"People may be sleep deprived because they stay up late preparing the night before for the trip and then want to get an early start," he said.

According to Alapat, sleep deprivation on road trips also can occur because people try to stay awake to drive late into the night instead of sleeping.

"All of these situations can lead to [chronic sleep deprivation](#) that will inevitably end up causing [excessive sleepiness](#), which is obviously very dangerous while driving and trying to maintain attention on the road," Alapat said.

Driving late at night or driving through adverse weather conditions becomes increasingly dangerous when people are sleep deprived.

"We know that most traffic accidents that occur at night are single-vehicle accidents – not multi-vehicle accidents. These accidents don't happen because there are too many cars on the road. It's because people are falling asleep at the wheel and run off the road or run into something on the side of the road because they have driven off the path," Alapat said. "Driving in adverse weather requires people to be even more alert than they would be otherwise, and someone who is fatigued or sleepy already has a compromised ability to pay attention."

In order to avoid falling asleep at the wheel, Alapat said to be aware of and not to ignore signs of sleepiness including droopy eyes and an

inability to stay alert while driving.

Alapat suggests that if people do find themselves feeling fatigued, they should switch drivers or pull over at a rest stop. He warned that caffeine should only be used to increase alertness for brief periods. Large caffeine doses actually are counterproductive since they contribute to poor quality sleep.

Alapat said the best way to prevent sleep deprivation is simply to sleep.

"Respect your body's need for sleep and try not to power through," Alapat said. "It is a better idea to take a break and arrive safely."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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