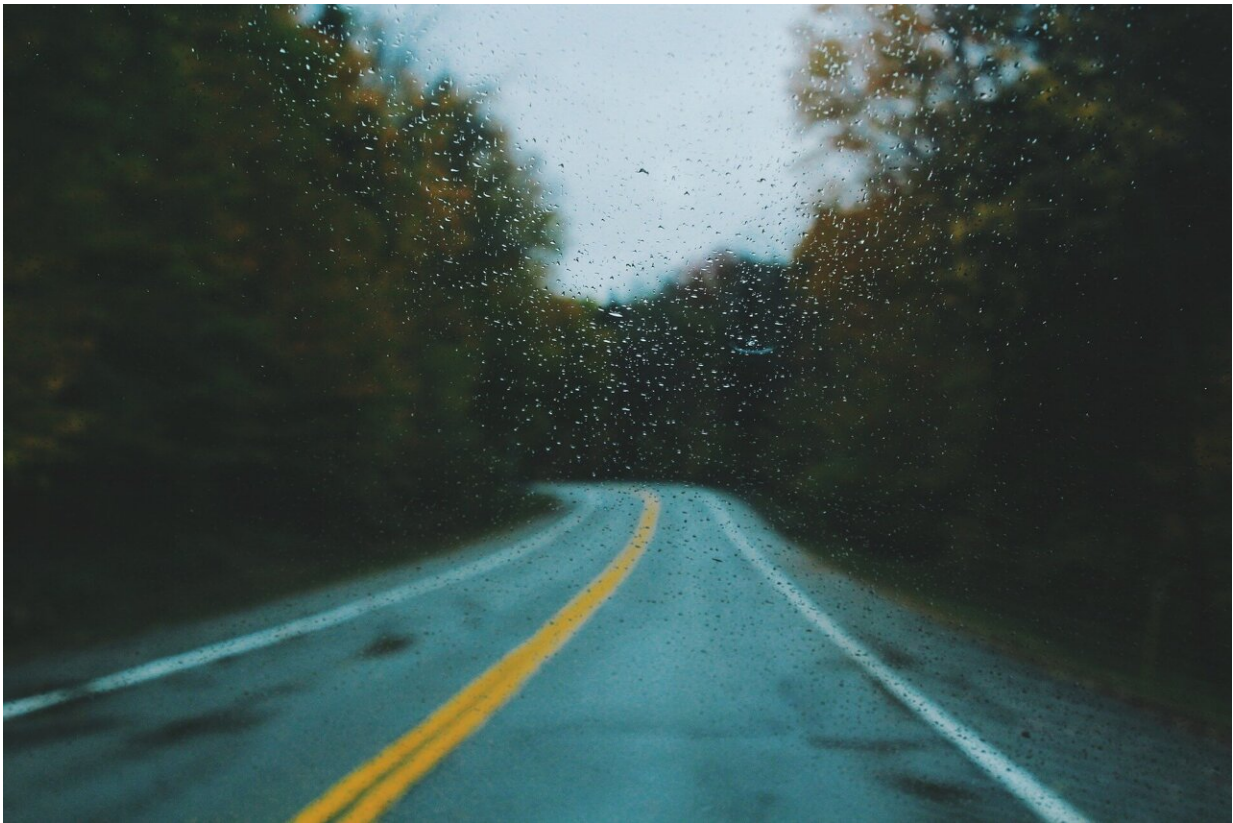


Sleep expert warns against drowsy driving on road trips

July 1 2024, by Aaron Nieto



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Road trips are a summer tradition for many families, but some drivers are so focused on reaching their destination that they 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 begin their trip.

"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. Additionally, most of us try to finish up a lot of work prior to the trip because of the anticipated lack of access during vacations.

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 significant sleep deprivation that will inevitably end up causing excessive sleepiness and [fatigue](#), which can be 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 are accidents that often happen because people fall asleep at the [wheel](#) and run off the road or run into something on the side of the road because they have driven out of their lane," 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."

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 can be counterproductive since they contribute to poor quality sleep whenever you are able to get the rest that you need.

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 better to take a break and arrive safely than not arrive at all."

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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