DRIVERS WITH SLEEP DISORDERS

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I- Goals

A. Review studies of drivers with sleep disorders to answer several important questions about sleepy drivers.

II- Are sleep disorders and excessive sleepiness common?

A. Sleep Apnea occurs in 24-9% of adult males and 9-4% adult females (ages 30-60). Less than 5% of these subjects with sleep apnea are aware of their condition (1).

B. Eight percent of a randomly selected group of working adults without sleep apnea are pathologically sleepy from other causes.

C. Conclusion: Sleep disorders and sleepiness are common and unrecognized in adult drivers. These sleep disorders are more common than diabetes, seizure disorders, and alcoholism among drivers.

III- Do untreated sleep disorders adversely effect driving?

A. Several studies using various driving simulators show that subjects with sleep apnea and narcolepsy perform poorer than controls (2, 3).

B. One preliminary study suggests that subjects with sleep apnea or narcolepsy perform as poorly as legally intoxicated drivers.

C. Conclusion: Subjects with untreated sleep apnea and narcolepsy are poor drivers and may drive as poorly as the dreaded, drunk driver.

IV- Does untreated sleep disorders effect auto crash rates?

A. Studies from the United States and Canada show that auto crash rates are 2 or 3 times greater in untreated subjects with sleep apnea or narcolepsy (4, 5).

B. These auto crashes may cause serious injury or death (6).

C. Conclusion: Drivers with untreated sleep apnea or narcolepsy have a high automobile crash rate.

V- Does treatment of sleep disorders improve driving performance?

A. Studies from United States and Europe show that successful treatment of sleep apnea and narcolepsy improve driving performance (2, 3, 7).

B. Studies have shown a significant decrease in reported auto crashes in patients with sleep apnea successfully treated with nasal CPAP (8, 9).
C. Conclusion: Successful treatment of sleep apnea or narcolepsy improves driving performance and may prevent many serious auto crashes.

D. Recent reviews have suggested guidelines for physicians caring for drivers with sleep disorders\(^{(10,11)}\).

**REFERENCES:**


5.- George Q Nickerson P, Handly P, Millar T, Kryger N. Sleep apnoea patients have more automobile accidents. Lancet 1987; 8556: 447.


