

Teen Drivers Need a Full Tank of Z-Z-Z-Z-Zs

Teen drivers have the highest crash rates in the country. They also are likely to have the least sleep. GEICO (geico.com) agrees with a growing number of sources that teen crash rates could be reduced by a good night's sleep.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) tracks vehicle fatalities and found that more than 3,500 teens ages 13-19 died in motor vehicle crashes in 2009. More detailed research also indicates that "drowsy driving" is a significant problem that increases the risk of a crash or near-crash, and young drivers are particularly vulnerable since they operate most of the time on much less sleep than they need.



A nation of sleepy teenagers

Two critical factors* collide when teens are in their early driving years:

- they need nearly 9.5 hours of sleep every night to accommodate an upswing in growth and hormone development, and
- they get far less sleep than they need – an average of 7.4 hours a night and considerably less for many.

Making the problem worse, teens' biological clocks are set so that they tend to fall asleep later at night and wake up later in the morning, a schedule which is impossible to follow due to early morning school starts for most teens. Parents with teen drivers should observe their teen's sleep habits and work on getting their teens more sleep.

Teens must have more sleep to:

- stay alert
- make sound judgments
- maintain clear thinking and quick reflexes while driving

It's important for both parents and teens to recognize the signs of fatigue and rework daily schedules to allow for healthier sleep cycles. It won't be easy. Teens have a lot to keep them up on school nights: studies, anxiety over grades, after-school sports and social activities that delay study time, relationship issues, over-stimulation from media sources such as Facebook, computer games and an overload of cell phone use and text messaging. These factors could lead to *sleep deprivation*.

Your teen may be sleep deprived if he or she:

- can't wake up in the morning
- is irritable late in the day
- falls asleep spontaneously throughout the day
- sleeps for long periods of time on weekends