

# Are you guilty of “presenteeism” behind the wheel?



Gear Up For Safe Driving: **MIND • BODY • VEHICLE**

**Presenteeism:**  
[‘prezən’ti:lizəm]  
*Noun:* When employees show up for work even if they are **too sick, stressed, or distracted** to be productive.<sup>1</sup>

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Presenteeism has been estimated to cost employers \$63 billion in lost productivity<sup>2</sup>. Presenteeism behind the wheel — there in body but not in mind — can cost more than big dollars.
- A recent study found that “mind wandering” was responsible for nearly 50% of crashes where the driver was at fault.<sup>3</sup>
- The data is clear—virtually all studies have concluded that manipulating a hand-held device while driving (eyes off the road, hands off the wheel, and mind focused on activities unrelated to driving) leads to less safe driving.
- Many over-the-counter and prescription drugs for common ailments, including allergies, colds, depression, muscle pain, anxiety disorders and high blood pressure can cause drowsiness, slow reaction time and impair vision and coordination.
- A recent 100-car naturalistic driving study has shown that fatigue is a contributing factor in 20% of crashes with significantly more crashes/near crashes due to fatigue occurring during the day than at night.<sup>4</sup>

**Being present and engaged behind the wheel means you are driving *actively*.**

## WHAT IS ACTIVE DRIVING?

**Minimizing distractions.** Resisting activities unrelated to driving that take your eyes or mind off of the road and your hands off the wheel.

**Being alert and clear-headed.** Unimpaired by alcohol, over-the-counter or prescription medication and well-rested prior to getting behind the wheel.

**Frequently scanning your mirrors.** Many fleet safety programs recommend a “full mirror sweep” every 5-6 seconds. If a vehicle suddenly appears in one of your mirrors without you noticing its approach, you’ll know you are not shifting your eyes frequently enough.

**Maintaining a proper following distance.** On clear, dry roads, your following distance should be 3-4 seconds — double or triple if roads are wet or slippery, keeping in mind that in some cases it’s best to stay off the roads until conditions improve.

**Scanning ahead.** Looking down the road ahead of you for a distance of 10 seconds. In the city, that’s about one block and, on the highway, it’s about 1/3 of a mile or 4 city blocks.

**Watching your speed.** The faster you are driving, the less time you have to react to sudden moves by other drivers and the less time other drivers have to react to you. Always observe the speed limit and slow down to accommodate traffic, road, and other conditions.

**Taking time to recharge.** If driving a long distance, it is recommended you take a break every two hours or 100 miles, even if you don’t feel you need one. If after two hours of steady driving you don’t feel you need a break, this may be a strong sign that you are not actively engaged in your driving.

“SAFETY IS A STATE OF MIND — ACCIDENTS ARE AN ABSENCE OF MIND”

~Author Unknown

# Be at your best to avoid behind the wheel “presenteeism”



Gear Up For Safe Driving: **MIND • BODY • VEHICLE**

## Tips to help you get the recommended 7.5 – 8 hours of sleep nightly

**Keep the same schedule.** Try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning — even on weekends. A regular sleep routine keeps your biological clock steady so you rest better.

**Turn off electronics.** The blue light emitted by screened devices interferes with production of the sleep hormone melatonin. Plan to turn off electronics (televisions, laptops, tablets, etc.) an hour before bedtime.

**Cut the caffeine.** Caffeine affects everyone differently. You may need to cut out caffeine anywhere from 4-8 hours before bed for it to not have an effect on your sleep.

**Ease into your sleep routine.** Don't think of sleep as an on-off switch, but rather like slowly easing your foot off the gas pedal. Give your body time to transition from your active day to bedtime drowsiness by setting a timer for an hour before bed and breaking up the time as follows:

- **First 20 minutes:** Prep for tomorrow (pack your bag, set out your clothes).
- **Next 20:** Take care of hygiene — teeth brushing, shower, etc.
- **Last 20:** Relax in bed, reading with a small book light or practicing deep breathing.

## EAT BREAKFAST

Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. After eight to 12 hours without eating, our bodies and brains are ready to refuel. Not eating breakfast before your morning commute is like driving your car on an empty gas tank.

A recent UK study<sup>5</sup> concluded eating breakfast:

- Improves mental and physical performance throughout the day;
- Reduces anxiety significantly when faced with a challenging situation;
- Improves response time; and
- Improves hand-eye coordination significantly — all things that contribute to safe driving.

## DRINK WATER

We all want to think with clarity and it's especially critical when driving. In fact, staying hydrated is one of the simplest ways to keep energized and focused. Drinking water helps provide the ultimate brain fuel. According to experts, you should aim to refill your water glass every hour or two.



## PLAN AHEAD TO REDUCE STRESS

- Rise early enough to leave time for breakfast, even if it's something quick like wheat toast or fiber-rich cereal.
- Plan your route in advance. If you know ahead of time there will be construction or other delays along the way, you'll have the opportunity to take an alternate route or leave earlier.
- Leave extra time to check e-mail or messages before you head out, then silence and stow your mobile device so you can focus on the drive.
- Instead of a coffee-to-go, consider bringing a bottle of water to drink and refill throughout the day.

## JUST BREATHE...

If you find yourself rushed and stressed and you're about to be behind the wheel, take a few minutes for some deep breaths to re-center your focus before-hand. Deep breathing is one of the easiest ways to lower stress. Try it — it really works.

*By the time we sense thirst, our body is already dehydrated and as we age, our ability to sense dehydration diminishes. This is a good reason to establish the habit of drinking water on a regular basis — not just when you feel thirsty.*

*There are occasions when we just should not be behind the wheel. If you have received upsetting news or are dealing with emotional stress and have to travel by car, it may be best to let someone else do the driving.*

1 Hooper, Paul D., *Presenteeism*, 2012 CID Management  
 2 Harvard Medical School, 2013  
 3 Lagarde, Ph.D., senior researcher and head of department, School of Public Health, National Institute of Health and Medical Research, University of Bordeaux, France, 2012  
 4 VirginiaTech Transportation Institute, 100 Car Naturalistic Driving Study, April 2013  
 5 The Cognitive Effects of Breakfast, Mindlab Laboratory, UK, 2012

