**How to Stay Focused Whilst Driving Toolbox Talk**

We are all guilty of reaching our destination but not remembering much about the trip or how we got to our destination. For some drivers who regularly have to drive for 12 hours or more or those drivers who regularly drive the same route very frequently, it is easy to loose focus either due to tiredness or the mundane nature of the routine trip. It is these instances that can be so dangerous and account for many road accidents where drivers had been daydreaming and lost in their thoughts when they became involved in a road incident.

Coming out of a daydream behind the wheel causes a jolt and can really shock the system and make your heart plummet. Having another vehicle beeping their horn or feeling your vehicle swerve as you come out of a daydream is a real wake up call, and one you should wish to avoid.

Here are some tips to consider to avoid losing focus behind the wheel:

* Turn up the AC or fans to keep the temperature in your vehicle cool, direct the air onto your face if necessary to prevent you nodding off
* Keep hydrated, always drink plenty of water and keep a bottle in your vehicle within easy reach. Avoid sweet soft drinks as they do not hydrate as well and also carry lots of calories that are not beneficial.
* Chew gum, it helps keep your face muscles and brain active, choose the sugar free variety to prevent teeth cavities.
* Sing along to the radio or a favourite CD to help pass the time on a long monotonous journey. Avoid switching radio channels or CD’s too frequently as your concentration will be off the road as you do so
* Find a comedy radio channel and laugh along to jokes if this works well, having a laugh is a good antidote to sleepiness
* Moisturise your eyes using eye drops as on long journeys staring at the road for long periods of time causes the eyes to blink less and they can become dry. If using contact lenses keep a spare pair with you in case they require changing en route
* Pack healthy snacks such as nuts, crudités and fruit to eat, refrain from eating chocolate bars, crisps and sweets that make you feel sluggish and add empty calories into your diet
* Talk to yourself by reading the road – yes literally. Read every sign, number plate and car model you see. This will not only keep you focused but trains you to scan and be a vigilant driver to what is going on around you
* Get sufficient sleep, between 8 – 10 hours a night is recommended for adults. If you feel yourself nodding off pull over at the nearest services and have a short nap, drink a coffee or tea, as the caffeine will help you feel alert. Once rested proceed with your journey.

One of the best methods for addressing situational awareness and lack of focus is the habit of “Doing the rounds”. This means thinking of what you should be paying attention to and reminding yourself “I should probably know what’s going on around me”. The method involves first glancing into your left mirror, then looking ahead, then glancing in the right mirror, then looking ahead before finally looking in the rear mirror and then back to the road ahead.

This easy method ensures your eyes are re focusing regularly and not getting fixed on one spot in the distance or getting “highway hypnosis”. It enables you to check for potential hazards before they occur so you can proactively avoid them such as being tailgated or knowing when it is safe to lane change.

The best advice is to find which methods work best for you and your driving style and incorporate them into your daily driving routines to ensure your trips are safe and incident free.

# Key points to remember

* Be alert to the danger of “highway hypnosis” and being on auto pilot on familiar roads
* Pay attention to the road around you by “doing the rounds’ every few minutes whilst driving your vehicle
* Ensure you take a break from driving every two hours
* Consider the methods for keeping you focused when behind the wheel and practice your favourite ones when on the road

# Drivers’ discussion questions

1. Are you aware that the mental exercise called “doing the rounds” is the single most useful activity for staying alert whilst driving?
2. Do you get between 8 – 10 hours sleep per night to ensure you are well refreshed each day to drive?
3. Have you ever daydreamed behind the wheel and been jolted awake just in time to avoid a road incident?

Comments:

Date:

Meeting conducted by:

Attendees

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