

# National Sleep Foundation's 2024 Drowsy Driving Survey

**America's Sleep-Deprived Drivers Can  
Plan Better for Safety**



October 31, 2024

**National Sleep Foundation's 2024 Drowsy Driving Prevention Week Report**  
**America's Sleep-Deprived Drivers Can Plan Better for Safety**

**Summary of Findings**

Drunk driving is the most recognized form of impaired driving. Most adults aren't thinking about drowsy driving like drunk driving, even though sleeping only 3-4 hours affects driving performance and crash risk like having a few drinks.

In comparison to their attitudes and behaviors about driving after drinking, adult drivers are less likely to make safe decisions to avoid or help prevent their own or others' impaired driving when sleep deprived.

Specifically, drivers are less likely to:

- A. Delay or change plans to avoid drowsy driving**
- B. Find alternative transportation to avoid drowsy driving**
- C. Refrain from getting behind the wheel when they haven't gotten enough sleep**

People are also less likely to urge someone to not drive due to insufficient sleep compared to having a few drinks.

It is time to wake up to the dangers of drowsy driving. Being alert and awake behind the wheel is as important as not being under the influence.

**Introduction**

National Sleep Foundation (NSF) has led ongoing efforts to help prevent drowsy driving since its founding in 1990 to promote sleep health and safety. Formally, NSF developed and has hosted Drowsy Driving Prevention Week® since 2007, with 2024 marking its 17<sup>th</sup> year as a national campaign to educate the public about the dangers of drowsy driving and ways to help prevent it. The first step for prevention is ensuring drivers get enough of the quality sleep they need to be alert behind the wheel.

Drowsy driving is impaired driving, often called the "fourth D" among drunk, drugged, and distracted causes of crashes. Drowsy driving is a significant public health and safety concern in the United States. Data from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety indicate that drowsy driving is implicated in 21% (or one in five) of all motor vehicle crashes resulting in a death. Because

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there are challenges measuring and estimating drowsy-driving crashes, National Sleep Foundation (NSF) believes the real public health burden of drowsy driving is much larger.

Representative, population-based surveys by NSF have highlighted strong general public awareness of the risks associated with drowsy driving (see [2022](#) and [2023](#) Reports); still, the public's perceived risk of drowsy driving and related behavior change is notably lower compared to drunk driving. This may be the result of established legislation and a growing culture of safety and responsibility over time to prevent drunk driving. In this context it is critical to understand the tendency that sleep-deprived drivers will take specific steps to not drive when impaired, and how their current attitudes and behaviors may reflect their perceived importance of sleep to health and safety. To assess Americans' current likelihood to take specific actions to avoid and prevent drowsy driving, NSF conducted a nationally representative survey. Results were striking, suggesting many opportunities for continued public awareness, education, and behavior change to reduce the very real risks and effects of drowsy driving.

### **Drowsy Driving Survey**

In anticipation of the 2024 Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®, NSF conducted a survey among a probability-based, random sample of 1,421 Americans ages 18 years and older, oversampled for Black and Hispanic adults. The survey was produced by NSF, with sampling and administration via Ipsos Public Affairs KnowledgePanel® between September 19-30, 2024. Prior to data analysis, individuals were screened and 49 respondents were excluded for rapid responding, resulting in an analytic sample of 1,372 adults. To ensure the sample's capacity to reflect census values, the sample was weighted via iterative proportional fitting (i.e., raking) to ensure it reflected the general US population in regard to sex by age categories, race/ethnicity, education, geographic region, household income, and language proficiency. Results have a margin of sampling error of 2.9 points for the full sample, including design effects.

The survey asked how likely people are to (1) change plans, (2) find alternative transportation, or (3) drive anyway if they had (a) only gotten 3-4 hours of sleep or (b) had 2-3 (female) or 3-4 (male) alcoholic drinks. An NSF consensus guideline established that most healthy adults would be unfit to drive with only 3-5 hours of sleep in the previous 24 hours. Other studies have shown that sleeping only 4-5 hours in a 24-hour period increases a driver's crash risk as much as a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05 and getting less than 4 hours of sleep increases crash risk as much as a BAC of roughly 0.12. Consuming 2-3 (female) or 3-4 (male) alcoholic drinks will likely result in a similar range of BACs. Sleep duration and sleep quality were assessed via individual questions from the validated Sleep Health Index. Of note, some group differences in rates of being likely to change plans, find alternative transportation, drive

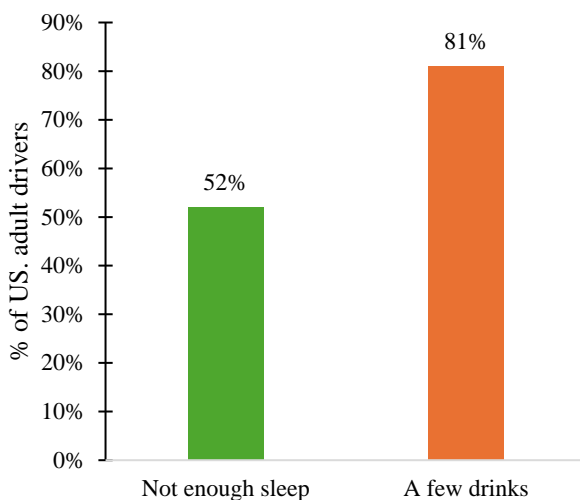
anyway, and encourage others to not drive were observed but are not included in this report. To inquire more about the survey data, please contact NSF Research at [Research@thensf.org](mailto:Research@thensf.org).

*Alternatives to Help Avoid and Prevent Drowsy and Drunk Driving*

Sleeping only 3-4 hours is like having a few alcoholic drinks: both result in similar driving impairments and crash risks. When someone has not had enough sleep or has had a few drinks, they are a risk to themselves and others when they choose to get behind the wheel. Unfortunately, people may make the unsafe decision to drive despite not having gotten enough sleep or having had a few drinks. There are, however, several concrete, actionable decisions everyone can make to avoid and prevent drowsy and drunk driving, including (1) changing plans, such as delaying or canceling plans, to avoid impaired driving or (2) finding alternative transportation options, like rideshares, taxis, or calling friends or family. Finally, preventing drowsy and drunk driving is everyone’s responsibility. Like drinking and driving, when we see someone making unsafe decisions, it is important to speak up and encourage that person to not get behind the wheel. These concrete behaviors were the focus of National Sleep Foundation’s 2024 Drowsy Driving Prevention Week®.

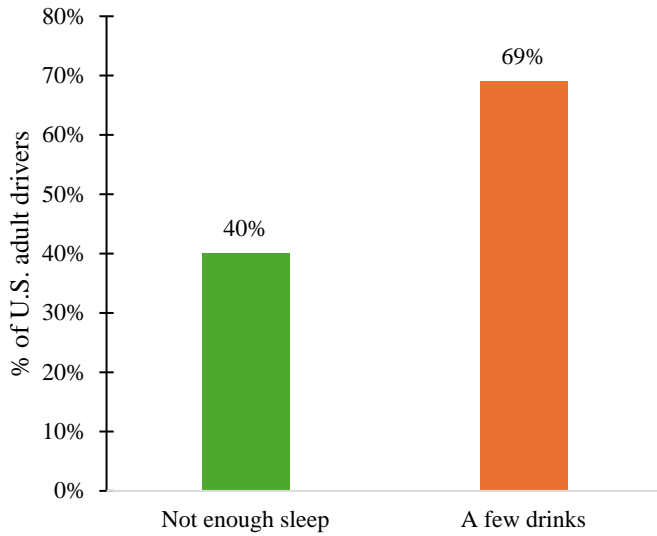
*Changing Plans to Avoid Drowsy and Drunk Driving*

When Americans were asked if they would change or cancel plans to avoid impaired driving, 52% of adult drivers reported being likely to do so if they had not gotten enough sleep compared to 81% of adult drivers who said they would be likely to do so if they had a few drinks (Figure 1). Drivers who were likely to change their plans to avoid drowsy driving had longer average weekly sleep durations and better sleep quality than drivers who were unlikely to change plans to avoid drowsy driving.



**Figure 1.** Percent of U.S. adult drivers who reported being likely to change or cancel plans to avoid impaired driving due to not getting enough sleep or having a few drinks.

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**Figure 2.** Percent of U.S. adult drivers who reported being likely to find alternative transportation to avoid impaired driving due to not getting enough sleep or having a few drinks.

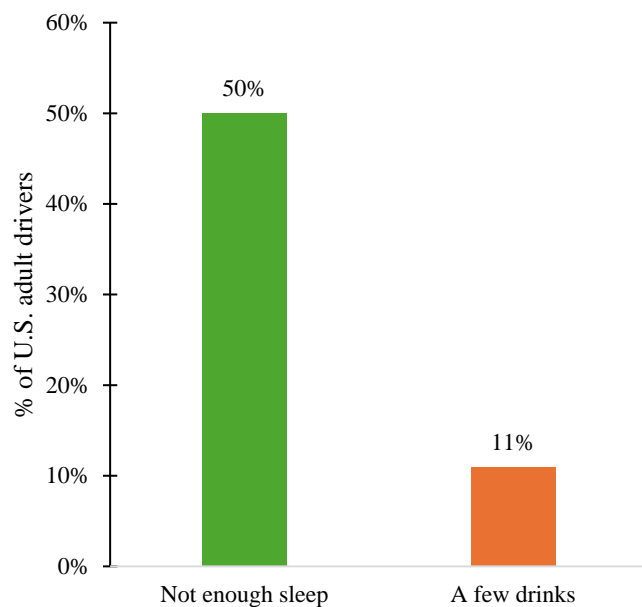
### *Finding Alternative Transportation to Avoid Drowsy and Drunk Driving*

Just forty percent of U.S. drivers reported being likely to find alternate transportation, like rideshares or friends/family, to avoid drowsy driving, while close to 70% of U.S. drivers reported being likely to find alternate transportation to avoid drunk driving (Figure 2). Drivers who were likely to find alternative transportation to avoid drowsy driving had longer average weekly sleep durations and better sleep quality than drivers who were unlikely to find alternative transportation to avoid drowsy driving.

### *Driving Despite Not Getting Enough Sleep or Having a Few Drinks*

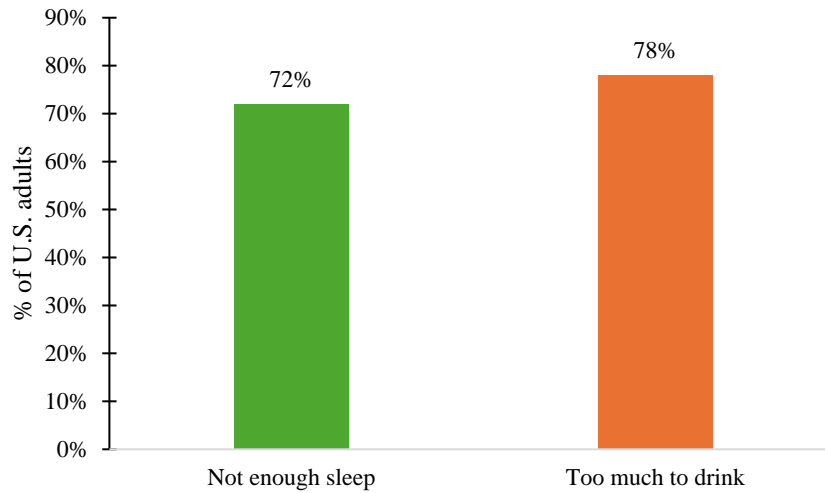
U.S. adults were also asked to report their likelihood of keeping their plans and driving despite only sleeping 3-4 hours or having a few drinks (Figure 3). Fifty percent of all drivers reported being likely to keep their plans and drive despite only sleeping 3-4 hours, while only 11% of all drivers reported being likely to keep their plans and drive despite having a few drinks. Drivers who were likely to drive despite only having slept for 3-4 hours had shorter average weekly sleep durations and poorer sleep quality than drivers who were unlikely to drive despite only having slept for 3-4 hours.

**Figure 3.** Percent of U.S. adult drivers who reported being likely to keep their plans and drive while probably impaired from not getting enough sleep or having a few drinks.



*Speaking Up to Prevent Drowsy and Drunk Driving*

Nearly 72% of American adults have suggested to a driver who has not had enough sleep to drive safely that they should not get behind the wheel, compared to 78% of adults who have urged someone who had a few drinks to not drive (Figure 4). Adults who suggested someone not drive due to insufficient sleep had worse sleep quality than adults who have not suggested that someone should avoid driving due to insufficient sleep—perhaps indicating that they are more aware of the dangers of driving after poor sleep from personal experience.



**Figure 4.** Percent of U.S. adults who have urged someone not to drive due to insufficient sleep or having a few drinks.

**Conclusion**

Drowsy driving is a preventable form of impaired driving and a concern for public health and safety. It can be as dangerous as driving while intoxicated. Put simply, being awake and alert behind the wheel is as important as not being under the influence. Unfortunately, adult drivers reported being nearly five times more likely to keep their plans and drive while drowsy than if they had been drinking. In fact, across every assessed method to avoid and prevent drowsy and drunk driving, people were more likely to practice safer behaviors when it came to drunk driving. This is troubling, as drowsy driving is a preventable form of impaired driving, responsible for over 20% of crash related fatalities.

As reflected in this and other National Sleep Foundation population research, it appears the cultural importance of preventing drunk driving has not sufficiently generalized to other high-risk forms of impairment like drowsy driving. Still, there is a call to action to directly address the purpose and critical need for preventing drowsy driving, as with all forms of impaired

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driving, to benefit public health and safety. Legislation, focused enforcement, legal and financial deterrents also may have a role.

The National Sleep Foundation is dedicated to improving the public's health and well-being through sleep education and advocacy. Notably, adults who slept longer and had better quality sleep were also more likely to take steps to avoid and prevent drowsy driving, highlighting healthy sleep may also empower people to make healthy, safe decisions. It's everyone's responsibility to help prevent drowsy driving, starting with getting adequate sleep. The best way to avoid drowsy driving is to *Sleep First. Drive Alert*®. Please visit [theNSF.org](https://www.nsf.org) for information about how anyone and everyone can be their Best Slept Self®.