1. Plan your driving holiday well. Have the family discuss a Journey management plan, where you briefly plan each part of the drive, noting places of interest to stop every couple of hours. It could be an interesting shop, landmark, playground for the kids to expend some energy or even just your favourite bakery. The thing is, if it is fun or interesting, you will stop and break up the trip. Consider an overnight stop on those really long drives of more than 5 or 6 hours.

2. Check the vehicle or have it checked a week or so before you go. Check all fluids and have extra coolant, oil and at least 10 litres of spare water (getting stuck on the side of the road in 45 degree heat will show you why). Make sure the spare tyre is in good condition and inflated to the right pressure. Clean the inside of the car to make the journey more pleasant. Have a rubbish bag!

3. Have everything packed well in advance and don’t leave it till last minute. Make up lists of what you will need for the holiday (fishing, kayaking, cooking, etc) and have a spot to start getting it all together. Have the kids help make up their list and they can cross each item off as they go. Aim to have all items ready the day before you pack the vehicle. Don’t let packing make you stressed!

4. Make sure you are able to go to bed early and get sufficient sleep. Research shows that if you can get 7-8 hours of sleep each day for most of the week, you are in a great position to be resilient to stress and the odd short sleep. Remember, if you don’t get enough sleep in bed, you might find your brain driving you to sleep at the wheel. To ensure you get time for sleep, take an extra hour or two off work to get home early afternoon and start packing the vehicle. Have a slow meal cooking or order take-out to reduce the amount of work you need to do. Packing the vehicle should be increasing your excitement about going on holiday.

5. Don’t get up early to avoid the traffic. Most people like to do this, however, there is too much evidence suggesting that driving prior to 6AM makes you get up too early and the result is driving tired. Many fatal fatigue crashes have occurred due to this. Try and sleep at least 7 to 8 hours and wake up fresh. Rather than beat the traffic, let the traffic go early so that your drive is more pleasant. If you are not in a rush, you may make better driving decisions regarding overtaking and tailgating.

6. Have a plan to share driving if you have a capable driving passenger. Research has shown that when drivers have driven fatigued, they often had the opportunity to swap drivers but did not do so. If you make a plan to swap drivers during the drive, you are more likely to do this and avoid fatigue crashes.

7. If your passengers go to sleep, you might too. Many of the fatigue crashes I have investigated have had passengers asleep. If your passengers are asleep, you do not apply alerting strategies, such as stopping often, winding down the window for fresh air, getting music playing to decrease boredom, etc. Have your passengers sleep a good sleep in their bed at home prior to leaving on the trip. Ensure they converse with you on the trip. Play games that are not distracting!

8. Mobile phones are for passengers only. Get passengers to do your texting and making calls. There is absolutely no excuse for texting/calling while driving. It is never safe to do so. Get the family interested in the drive and places you might visit when you stop for a break. If your passengers are on electronic devices the whole trip, it won’t be as interesting and the driver may get drowsy due to boredom.

9. Make up a driving meal & snacks. Organise to take healthy snacks of cut up fruit and tasty proteins (nuts, boiled eggs, chicken, jerky, etc). Have a picnic at one of the designated stops on your journey plan. Have the kids pull a few Christmas crackers or open a small present to keep them excited about the holiday. Take plenty of fresh water! Dehydration leads to fatigue and drinking fresh water keeps you feeling much better than carbonated or caffeine based drinks will.

10. Don’t drive past your limits. Most drivers are not professionals (like truck drivers) and are not good at estimating how far they can go before needing a rest. Most importantly, sleepiness portends sleep. If you feel sleepy, it is likely you will fall asleep at the wheel. Be smart and change drivers or stop at the first sign of tiredness.

Visit www.beyondmidnight.org website to download this free poster and make it available to everyone you know to help reduce fatigue crashes over holiday periods. The website has all of this in the module “Driving Holidays” where you can learn much more about driving safely and avoiding fatigue.