

## Fatigue at Work, on the Road Can be Deadly



Daylight Saving Time begins every year on the second Sunday in March. We "lose" an hour when the clocks are set forward (except in Hawaii and most of Arizona), and for many that means a tired couple of days as our bodies adjust.

People often make light of how little sleep they get on a regular basis; an over-worked, over-tired condition has become the norm for many. But a good night's sleep is not just a novelty, it's a necessity. The effects of fatigue are far-reaching and can have an adverse impact on all areas of our lives.

**Work often requires us** to override those natural sleep patterns. More than 43% of workers are sleep-deprived, and those most at risk work the night shift, long shifts or irregular shifts. Following are a few facts for employers: **(continued on page 2)**

## How Employees Can Get Better Sleep



While employers can help by optimizing schedules, allowing napping and educating employees, ultimately the responsibility for getting enough sleep lies with the individual. Following are some of the ways employees can reduce their risk of fatigue.

### Check for Consistency in Your Sleep Duration

Do you sleep more on your days off than workdays? If so, you're not sleeping enough on workdays. Seven hours is the minimum recommended, but some people need more.

If you're unsure, take the vacation test. While on vacation, allow yourself to sleep as much as you want. After several days, your sleep duration will stabilize. That should be your minimum amount of daily sleep.

### Keep a Consistent Sleep Schedule

Just as important as sleep duration, a sleep schedule also will help keep you on your game during work hours.

- Use light to your advantage; morning light brightens your mood and helps synchronize your internal clock
- Don't eat big meals close to bedtime, as this can affect your sleep quality; have dinner several hours before bed each night
- Avoid exercise in close proximity to bedtime; regular exercise generally improves sleep, but not if you do it near bedtime

### Set Yourself up for Sleep Success

To help yourself get more rest and avoid fatigue, practice habits that will help you improve the quality of your sleep.

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- Safety performance decreases as employees become tired
- 62% of night shift workers complain about sleep loss
- Fatigued worker productivity costs employers \$1,200 to \$3,100 per employee annually
- Employees on rotating shifts are particularly vulnerable because they cannot adapt their "body clocks" to an alternative sleep pattern

**Drowsy driving is impaired driving**, but while we wouldn't allow a friend to drive drunk, we rarely take the keys away from our tired friends or insist they take a nap before heading out on the road. NSC has gathered research that shows:

- You are three times more likely to be in a car crash if you are fatigued
- Losing even two hours of sleep is similar to the effect of having three beers
- Being awake for more than 20 hours is the equivalent of being legally drunk

According to the CDC, the fall time change can also create, "a sudden change in the driving conditions in the late afternoon rush hour – from driving home from work during daylight hours to driving home in darkness. People may not have changed their driving habits to nighttime driving and might be at somewhat higher risk for a vehicle crash."

**Sleep is a vital factor in overall health.** Adults need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep each night, but 30% report averaging less than six hours, according to the National Health Interview Survey.

- Chronic sleep-deprivation causes depression, obesity, cardiovascular disease and other illnesses
- Fatigue is estimated to cost employers \$136 billion a year in health-related lost productivity
- More than 70 million Americans suffer from a sleep disorder

Americans receive little education on the importance of sleep, sleep disorders and the consequences of fatigue, but industry leaders recently have been drawing attention to this issue. Employers, too, are in an ideal position to educate employees on how to avoid fatigue-related safety incidents. NSC supports science-based fatigue risk management systems in the workplace.

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- Avoid chemicals that affect sleep; caffeine, nicotine and alcohol can all contribute to sleep problems
- Check with your doctor about side effects before starting a medication, and follow up if you think medicine could be affecting your sleep
- Make your bedroom conducive to sleep; a quiet, dark room that is not too hot and not too cold will help you relax and get to sleep sooner
- If you have daytime sleepiness or your bed partner witnesses snoring or breathing pauses, you may have sleep apnea and should see a sleep specialist

### Create a Routine

The more you can get your body used to going to sleep at a certain time, the easier it will be for you to get good sleep consistently:

- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine and stick to it
- Avoid stressful activities, especially before bed, so you don't associate your bedroom and sleeping with anxiety
- Don't go to bed for sleep unless you are truly sleepy; lying in bed "trying to sleep" when you are not sleepy is counterproductive and can make it harder for you to fall asleep at other times.

### Reminder!!!!

Temperatures are up! Prevent heat stress. Drink plenty of water. Stay Hydrated!

### Did You Know?

When an injury, incident or near miss occurs, an accident investigation allows employers and workers to identify and implement corrective actions as a way to prevent future incidents.

### Safety Tip of the Month

A clean place is a safe place. Good housekeeping can reduce the number of injuries in your workplace. Put things away after use, throw away trash and place objects in their proper place. Keep safety first.

### Notes From the Editor

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