



Fatigue

Sleep is an important factor in maintaining good health, well-being, memory, and the ability to think clearly. An adequate amount of sleep is defined as 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. If you don't get enough sleep due to work shifts, medical conditions, or other life factors, you could build up chronic sleep deprivation and fatigue.

Fatigue is a safety concern because it is associated with higher injury and accident rates in the workplace. Fatigue reduces your attention and reaction time, which can cause you to make errors in judgment leading to mistakes at work. In addition, fatigue lowers your overall well-being and increases the risks for many illnesses and diseases:

- Weight gain
- Obesity
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Digestive disorders
- Heart disease

Fatigue can also lead to involuntary micro-sleeps, or brief periods of unconsciousness, that can last two to thirty seconds. These episodes can mimic the effects of being under the influence of alcohol. Eighteen hours without sleep is similar to the effects of a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05, while 24 hours without sleep is similar to a BAC of 0.10. These effects can be especially dangerous when operating machinery or driving. As a reference, California laws define driving under the influence at a BAC of 0.08.

To prevent the risks of fatigue, know and watch for these symptoms:

- Tiredness
- Sleepiness
- Irritability
- Depression
- Giddiness
- Loss of appetite

Monitor your sleep schedule to see if you are getting adequate sleep. If you have days or nights where you don't get enough sleep, determine what may be the cause and take preventive measures. Some factors include:





- Interrupted sleep patterns
- Sleep disorders
- Medical conditions
- Shift work
- Life demands
- Uncontrolled stress
- Poor sleep habits
- Alcohol or drug use

The best way to rest and control fatigue is to understand normal sleep patterns and cycles. Your body follows a natural circadian rhythm that is regulated by your brain and light levels. It prefers to sleep at night, but can be adjusted for shift work schedules with proper planning.

Your sleep is separated into four stages.

- Stage 1 is a light shallow sleep, which you can easily awaken from.
- Stage 2 is a deeper sleep, and you can easily be awakened.
- Stage 3 is a deep sleep that leaves you groggy and disoriented upon awakening.
- Stage 4, the final stage, is Rapid Eye Movement (REM). This is the stage of dreaming, processing emotions, and the healing of the body. REM sleep cycles occur about every 1.5 hours of sleep.

Plan your naps and sleep periods between and after shifts to take advantage of these different sleep stages. A short nap of 20 to 30 minutes can help you get a quick, refreshing sleep while staying in the early sleep stages (1 and 2). For sleep periods longer than 20-30 minutes aim for 1.5 hours, 3 hours or 4.5 hours for restorative REM sleep.

If you determine that you have sleep challenges, consider these methods in alleviating fatigue:

- Maintain your overall health and well-being with a balanced diet, and moderate exercise.
- Minimize or quit smoking and drinking.
- If taking medication, review your medications with your doctor to see if they disrupt sleep and if you can, take them at a scheduled time that will minimize the disruption of sleep.
- Protect your sleep with darkened rooms, cooler temperatures, and comfortable bedding.



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Safety Talk

- Postpone chores, place your phone on silent, and minimize sleep disruptions.
- Take a quick rest break during your work shift or before you commute home.
- Keep your work environment bright, cool, and vary your tasks to maintain your alertness.
- Seek medical attention for sleep disorders (e.g. sleep apnea) that can disrupt your sleep.

You can control sleep deprivation and fatigue to maintain your alertness and reaction times for a safe workplace. Medical treatment for sleep disorders, proper planning of sleep and work shifts, and good sleep hygiene ensure you get the rest you need.

Please note – some occupations such as the healthcare, trucking and/or airline industries may have hours of service limitations, so consult laws and best practices for your profession.

SOURCE: toolboxtopics.com



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