

# Sleep and Worker Fatigue

## What Causes Worker Fatigue?

Several factors including too little, poor quality, or interrupted sleep over time can cause fatigue. Fatigue is the body's signal that a rest period is needed. Long work hours and extended and irregular shifts may be stressful physically, mentally, and emotionally, and demanding work schedules may disrupt the body's natural cycle, leading to increased fatigue, stress and lack of concentration.

Irregular and extended shifts are common among healthcare providers, transportation workers, first responders, military personnel, construction workers and many others.

## What Are the Effects of Worker Fatigue?

Worker fatigue increases the risk of illness and injuries. Compared to day shifts, accident and injury rates are 18% greater during evening shifts and 30% greater during night shifts. Research indicates that working 12 hours per day is associated with a 37% increased risk of injury.

Decreased alertness from worker fatigue has been a contributing factor in:

- Increased sleep problems and risk for injury among full-time employees in relation to the number of hours worked per week
- Direct or indirect links to increased costs to employees from lost productivity, increased injury and illness costs and increased time off the job due to illness
- An estimated annual cost of \$136.4 billion from fatigue-related, health-related lost productive work time to employers

Fatigue can cause weariness, sleepiness, irritability, reduced alertness, impaired decision making and lack of motivation, concentration and memory. Studies have shown that fatigue is linked to many health problems from heart disease and depression to obesity and sleep disorders.

## What Are Some Ways to Improve Sleep Patterns?

The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) (OSHA) recommends the following measures to promote a restful and healthy sleep pattern:

- Sleep for 7-9 hours daily without disruptions
- Try to sleep at the same time every day
- Avoid drinks with caffeine prior to bedtime to improve sleep quality
- If working evenings or nights, make sure to sleep within the last 8 hours before
- If napping before work, make sure that the duration is less than 45 minutes or greater than 2 hours to allow for a complete sleep/wake cycle
- Make sure that the sleeping environment is comfortable, cool, dark and quiet
- Exercise regularly, eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight
- If you have difficulty sleeping, keep a sleep diary and talk to your doctor