



# Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



## Connecting Healthy Sleep and Workplace Safety

Healthy work environments promote positive work-life balance for all employees, which in turn contributes to successful teams and the organization's overall performance.

Often overlooked, and a key contributor to organization and individual success, is sleep.

A 2015 report from the National Sleep Foundation identified that most adults need between seven to nine hours of sleep each night to function at their best during the day, and to keep their body and mind in optimal shape.<sup>1</sup>

Employees getting the right amount of sleep may improve their attention, behaviour, memory, and overall mental and physical health.<sup>2</sup>

It may be surprising, however, a recent study concluded Canadians don't get enough sleep on a daily basis, affecting both personal health and the economy's overall performance. Approximately 20 percent of Canadians get between six to seven hours of sleep daily and six percent get less than six hours.<sup>3</sup>

Lack of sleep has been linked with a range of negative health, social and performance outcomes impacting individuals' personal lives and the Canadian labour market. Sleep deprivation costs the Canadian economy \$26 billion per year. Across the country, 80,000 working days are lost each year because of sleep-deprived workers.<sup>4</sup>

All employers should take the issue of workplace fatigue seriously. For shift and night workers, drivers, and people who work extended hours, those on call, or those having rotating shift schedules, fatigue in the workplace is of particular concern as the length and quality of sleep is often impacted.<sup>5</sup> The risk of a fatigue-related incident increases with these workers.

Lack of sleep impairs brain functioning, thereby making fatigue a workplace hazard. Research has found that workers who have slept less than five hours or who have been awake for more than 16 hours have a significantly increased risk of making mistakes at work due to fatigue.<sup>6</sup>



**Potential effects to workplace safety:<sup>5</sup>**

- 1. Decreased alertness and attention.** Particularly for jobs that require attention to detail and accuracy. Fatigue is more likely to cause distraction and a lack of focus, which can impact an individual's productivity and safety.
- 2. Decreased reaction time.** When fatigued, employees require additional time to process scenarios and situations because concentration and the ability to retain information is lowered.
- 3. Decreased cognitive functioning.** Concentration, memory, logical reasoning, and decision making are all cognitive functions that diminish with lack of sleep. Particularly vulnerable from lack of sleep is the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for many high-level cognitive functions (i.e. decision making, planning skills, emotions).

In addition to the correlation that studies have found between sleep and workplace safety, there are other ways fatigued workers can affect your bottom line.<sup>7</sup>

Effects of lack of sleep on the workplace:

- Impeded communication skills
- Reduced decision-making ability
- Decreased memory function
- Increased errors in judgment
- Absenteeism, turnover, and medically related costs

Business owners, key leaders, and managers may reduce workplace fatigue by implementing a Fatigue Risk Management Plan (FRMP). A FRMP should be tailored to reflect the conditions, size and scope of your workplace.





**How to create a successful FRMP:<sup>8</sup>**

- 1. Statement of Intent and Scope.** Document your organization’s commitment to managing fatigue-related safety risks. Identify the scope (i.e., sites, operations, and tasks to which it applies), and define the roles and responsibilities of all applicable parties (employees, managers, teams and departments, etc.).
- 2. Statement of Acceptable Work Hours and Overtime Limits.** Document the maximum work hours in a standard day, week, month, and the maximum overtime hours if applicable. Set established parameters and guidelines for breaks and rest periods between scheduled shifts to ensure workers do not exceed what is considered appropriate or safe.
- 3. Identifying and Assessing Risk.** All areas of potential risk must be documented, with greater scrutiny in the areas where safety issues related to fatigue are more likely to occur and identify those who are at increased risk. As employees are most familiar with daily working routines and requirements, they should be contributing players in this stage of plan development.
- 4. Minimizing and Controlling Risk.** Document plans to minimize and control each risk and include solutions that address each risk, ensuring the procedures for mitigating risk are clearly communicated and available to employees. Examples of solutions include changing start times, re-assigning duties, posting reminders around the workplace and providing a service for employees to be screened and treated for sleep disorders.

- 5. Investigating Fatigue Incidents.** Ensure your FRMP clearly states how incidents should be investigated, as well as include the processes and procedures for investigating whether worker fatigue was accountable. Create a supportive environment and include processes for workers to feel encouraged and comfortable to self-report their fatigue before an accident occurs.
- 6. Awareness and Training.** Perhaps the most critical stage of the plan. A plan can only be successful if people are aware of it and are able to utilize the procedures to increase workplace safety. All employees should understand what the risk management plan is, what safety procedures are in place for each risk, and how the plan applies to their position, duties and responsibilities. Educate your employees through formalized training programs, and introduce continuing refresher courses on specific topics, such as sleep safety.
- 7. Auditing and Improving.** Audit your risk management plan annually. Continually work on identifying and improving areas of opportunity. As time goes on, new risks may be identified, and your FRMP should evolve by developing new procedures to manage new areas of concern.

A successful FRMP will benefit the organization in numerous ways. From increased safety measures, lower incident rates and decreases in fatigue-related costs, to improved employee productivity, health, morale and satisfaction, organization and employee will both benefit.<sup>7</sup>



## Combating Fatigue: Steps to maintain healthy sleep habits

There are many ways to improve the quality of sleep, and consciously incorporating even a few strategies will likely lead to a more restful sleeping experience for your employees. Below are sleep habits that you can share with your team and workforce:

- Avoid going to bed on a full – or empty – stomach
- Avoid sleeping in, even on weekends
- Create a relaxing evening ritual
- Exercise
- Go to bed when you're truly tired
- Keep your bedroom quiet, cool, and dark
- Limit your napping
- Remove electronics from your bedroom
- Steer clear of caffeine and other stimulants
- Stick with a routine that includes a predictable sleep schedule
- Use your bed for sleep... and sleep alone

Sleep is an essential component and critical element of a mindful, healthy, and balanced lifestyle. Many individuals are in need of more sleep, and its many benefits. Make a point of educating your employees about sleep strategies, and don't forget to practice what you preach. Sweet dreams!

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