

Preventing Fatigue

Worker fatigue: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 15 million Americans work irregular schedules, including full-time evening shifts, night shifts, and rotating shifts (where workers alternate between working nights and days in a given week). These kinds of shifts have been associated with safety and health risks, and certain jobs (such as disaster response) are at higher risk. Many of the risks result from worker fatigue.

Staying focused: Being tired affects your ability to focus for extended periods of time, and can increase the chance that you will not pay attention to the task at hand (such as operating a machine or a vehicle). Circadian rhythm is a 24-hour, internal cycle that controls when you feel alert or when you feel sleepy.

A disruption in circadian rhythm can:

- Affect your ability to perform.
- Affect your ability to focus for extended periods of time.
- Increase the chance that you will not pay attention to the task at hand such as operating a machine or a vehicle.
- Lead to errors that could cause accidents or injuries.

What can be done to prevent fatigue?

- **Get regular rest:** Rest and recovery are important. Get at least 10 consecutive hours per day of off-duty time so that you can have at least 7-8 hours of sleep. Shorter off-duty periods can exacerbate fatigue. It is also important to maintain a regular sleeping rhythm if possible. Fatigue is often intensified when working at night because of inadequate daytime rest.
- **Take breaks:** For demanding work, take frequent rest breaks every couple of hours.
- **Moderate your workload:** If you're working a twelve hour shift, do lighter tasks if possible. Intense work, such as physical exertion or in extreme environments, should have shorter shifts.
- **Workload distribution:** Schedule heavy or demanding work at times when you are more alert to decrease the risk of an accident.
- **Assess your environment:** Assure adequate lighting, clean air, and comfortable temperatures are provided if possible.

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What can be done to prevent fatigue (continued)?

- **Eat well:** Eat nutritious meals at regular times to help prevent fatigue. Avoid greasy foods and alcohol before sleeping.
- **Exercise:** Regular exercise can help regulate your sleeping cycle. Timing is important; do not exercise vigorously in the morning so that you are too tired to work. Alternatively, it's important to relax before going to bed.
- **Try different sleeping times:** If you are working a night shift, try sleeping at different times to establish what the best schedule is for you. Try keeping a notebook of when you go to bed and wake up, tracking how rested you feel. This can assist you in finding a sleeping schedule that works best for you.
- **When sleeping, protect your sleep:** Block out at least 6 hours of time to sleep and assure there will be no noise or distractions. Turn off your cellphone and use ear plugs if needed. Making your bedroom as dark as possible will also help.
- **Don't drink too much caffeine:** Caffeine can be used to fight off sleepiness, but do not use it excessively. Drink caffeine early in the shift and avoid it late in the shift or before going to bed. Avoid using amphetamines or other stimulants, as well as sleeping pills, which can affect your performance the next day. Monitor any medications which may affect sleep or work abilities!

