



5 minute safety talk

Fatigue

Good sleep is something we all need, but a significant number of us aren't getting enough of it. A 2016 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report states that 1 in 3 adults don't get enough sleep. It is estimated that approximately 37 percent of the U.S. workforce is sleep deprived. Sleep is necessary to regain stamina and face the day. It affects our long and short-term health. A lack of proper sleep can reach into the workplace and affect employee safety and performance.

How much sleep do you need?

Sleep needs vary by individual, so there is no magic number—you should sleep as much as you need to. However, most adults need between 7-9 hours each day. Teens need 9-10 hours while younger children need anywhere from 10-12 hours of sleep.

Aside from getting enough sleep, special attention should be paid to the quality of sleep. There are steps you can take to promote regular, healthy sleep known as sleep hygiene. Here are some tips from the National Sleep Foundation:

- Create and follow a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- Ensure your bedroom or sleeping area is quiet and dark and keep the temperature moderate—neither hot nor cold
- Make sure your bed is comfortable and remember that bedtime is for sleeping and not reading or watching TV
- Avoid the use of gadgets that emit light, especially smartphones and tablets. Using these devices before going to bed can inhibit restful sleep
- Don't eat a heavy meal right before bedtime

Effects of sleep deprivation

A sustained lack of sleep can have a serious impact on health. In the long term, chronic sleep deprivation has been shown to raise the risk for depression, obesity, cardiovascular disease and reproductive complications. These issues can lead to decreased productivity and increased healthcare costs for employee and employer alike.

In the short term, lack of sleep can cause issues in the workplace including increased tardiness and absenteeism. Workers may also have problems with concentration, listening to others, solving problems and making decisions as well as decreased attention, memory recall and vigilance.

If lack of sleep continues, the body builds a “sleep debt” for every hour of lost sleep. Getting extra sleep can reduce the debt, but if sleep deprivation becomes long term, it may not be possible to reverse the effects. You can’t just play catch up on the weekends.

As your body’s sleep debt increases, the more likely you are to experience microsleeps—a brief episode of sleep which can last anywhere from a fraction of a second up to 30 seconds. During a microsleep, you are temporarily unconscious.

This is especially dangerous in the workplace. The National Sleep Foundation reports that highly fatigued workers are 70 percent more likely to be involved in an incident resulting in injury and workers who report disturbed sleep are nearly twice as likely to die in a work-related incident.

Drowsy driving

Lack of sleep also creates danger on the road. The problem is widespread. A recent AAA Foundation report estimated 328,000 crashes annually due to drowsy driving, with 109,000 resulting in injury and 6,400 resulting in a fatality. Drowsiness affects drivers in much the same way as alcohol: reduced attentiveness, slowed reaction time and impaired judgment. Driving while drowsy increases crash risk by nearly 300 percent.

Whether you are driving on the job, commuting to or from work, or are off the clock, make sure you are not too drowsy to drive. Pull over to a safe place and take a 15-20 minute nap if possible. If you are extremely fatigued, do not attempt to drive; call a friend, family member, colleague, fleet dispatch, cab or ride share to complete your trip safely.

Shift workers

About 15 percent of the U.S. workforce is comprised of workers who do not keep a traditional schedule. They include drivers, law enforcement, first responders, nurses and doctors. Because of this schedule, their body’s internal clock, also known as the circadian rhythm, is out of sync. The circadian rhythm tells the body to become alert in the morning and drowsy at night and produces sleep-promoting chemicals like melatonin. Even though their schedules may be different, shift workers still need the same amount of sleep. The National Sleep Foundation recommends the following for shift workers:

- Avoid long commutes and extending working hours
- Take several short breaks throughout the shift and remain active during breaks
- Drink—but don’t overdo—caffeinated beverages as needed throughout shift
- Use a “buddy system” of other coworkers to keep each other alert
- Wear dark glasses to block the sun on your commute home
- Keep a consistent bedtime and wake schedule
- Eliminate light and noise from your sleep environment