



5-minute safety talk

The Importance of Proper Sleep

As EMS professionals, we work around the clock all year long, including evenings, weekends, and holidays. Shift lengths can vary, lasting 24 hours or longer in some cases. Working these kinds of hours can result in fatigue and inadequate sleep that your body desperately needs.

Shift work that is not properly scheduled can produce many negative results. It can have negative effects on your health and mental well-being. Shift workers are more inclined to have sleeping disorders which can lead to a weakened immune system, making you more vulnerable to illnesses and infections. A lack of sleep can also lead to depression, over-eating, and changes in personality such as increased irritability.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends you:

- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature.
- Allow time to unwind and clear your mind before going to bed.
- Keep your bedroom dark.
- If you sleep during the day, wear an eye mask or use light-blocking curtains.
- Keep noise out by wearing ear plugs.
- Use white noise from a fan or noise machine to tune out external noises.
- Unplug your phone or turn off your cell phone.
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine intake or use of other stimulants, such as nicotine, near the end of your shift.
- Have a small snack before going to bed.
- Exercise regularly, but do not exercise right before going to bed.

- Keep a regular sleep schedule, even on your days off of work, if possible.
- Explain to your family the importance of minimizing interruptions while you rest, especially if you sleep during the day.
- If you continue to have difficulty sleeping, contact a sleep disorder specialist.

Fatigue can also lead to an inability to concentrate, which increases the likelihood for errors and accidents both on and off the job. This is of great concern for EMS professionals where quick judgment and attention to detail is vital.

It is of even greater concern for those driving the emergency vehicles. Sleep deprivation can have similar effects as driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, impairing the ability to make sound decisions. According to a study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, risk factors found in drowsy-driving accidents include:

- Staying awake for 24 hours or more
- Getting less than 6 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period
- Driving a vehicle between the hours of 12 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- Often feeling sleepy while driving
- Being a night-shift worker
- Working multiple jobs

This is concerning not only when driving on the job, but also for your drive home. This is especially true of workers coming off long shifts and/or evening shifts. Some tips to get you home safely include carpooling if possible, taking a quick nap before leaving work, or taking public transportation.

Balancing Work and Home

Your unique schedule can make balancing work and life responsibilities difficult. Remember that while you can't always control your work schedule, it is your responsibility not to over schedule your home life. Getting the proper amounts of rest and recovery will make all your daily interactions more pleasant and safe.

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