

## Fighting Fatigue in the Workplace

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 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.

This is because an irregular sleeping pattern disrupts your circadian rhythm. A circadian rhythm is a 24-hour, internal cycle that controls when you feel alert and when you feel sleepy. Disrupted circadian rhythms lead to worker fatigue. Fatigue can also be exacerbated by long work hours or insufficient rest during the workday.

### Effects of Fatigue

- Decreased ability to focus for extended periods of time
- Increased chance that you will not pay full attention to the task at hand, such as operating a machine or a vehicle
- Increased errors that could cause accidents or injuries
- Decreased ability to perform tasks effectively
- Decreased physical and mental health

### Fighting Fatigue during the Day

- Adjust lighting or temperature (or request that they be adjusted) if either is impairing your alertness at work.
- Eat nutritious meals at regular times.
- Exercise regularly. However, do not exercise too close to bedtime.

### Managing Your Workload

- Moderate your workload as much as possible. If shifts are long, try to choose lighter tasks. If the work is intense, try to work shorter shifts.
- Schedule heavy or demanding work at times when you are more alert to decrease the risk of an accident.
- For demanding work, take frequent rest breaks every couple of hours.
- Get at least 10 consecutive hours per day of off-duty time so that you can get 7 – 8 hours of sleep. This is the recommended amount of sleep for adults.

### Improving Sleep Quality

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Find a schedule that works for you. Some experimentation may be required, especially if you work a night shift.
- Circadian rhythms are affected by light, so make sure your room is sufficiently dark.
- Assure there will be no noise or distractions, or block out noise that will keep you awake.
- Regulate the temperature.
- Assess your bed's comfort level and make improvements if needed.
- Use your bed only for sleep.
- Do not eat large meals before bedtime. Especially avoid greasy foods and alcohol.
- Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evenings.
- 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.