

Fatigue

Fatigue affects a person's health, reduces performance and also increases the risk of an injury occurring in the workplace. Fatigue is the mental or physical exhaustion that stops a person from being able to function normally¹.

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Incidents are most likely to occur from midnight to dawn when our bodies are programmed to sleep².



Quick facts

- Most experts estimate that 20% to 30% of fatal road crashes could result from driver fatigue³.
- As humans are day oriented, we experience a reduction in activity from midnight to dawn due to changes in hormone levels and other bodily functions.
- Stimulants such as coffee can contribute to sleep loss if they are taken within six hours before sleep.

Common side effects associated with fatigue

- Lack of concentration.
- Impaired recollection of timing and events.
- Irritability.
- Poor judgement.
- Slower reaction times.

Shift workers

Shift workers tend to get less sleep than those who work equivalent hours during the day.

Tips for sleeping:

- Develop healthy ways of unwinding after work (eg. taking a walk or a bath).
- Inform relatives and friends of your work schedule to avoid disruptions.
- Go through all of the normal rituals of going to bed as you would before a normal sleeping night.

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Tips for sleeping continued:

- In your bedroom, curtains and blinds should have a back to minimise light.
- Be cautious with the use of sleeping tablets, which may appear useful in the short term but can be harmful in the long term.
- Cool conditions can help with getting to sleep and staying asleep.
- Always discuss changes in your medication with your doctor and seek advice.

Tips for eating:

- When working a night shift, try to have two meals at regular times and a light meal in the middle of the shift.
- Avoid drinking alcohol in the last few hours before sleeping.
- Eat a meal before 1am as the affects of digesting a meal can increase alertness in the second part of the night shift.
- Eat light, healthy food that is easy to digest.

For further tips on healthy eating visit:
www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm

Tips for driving:

- Avoid driving when tired.
- When driving home keep the mind active by listening to music.
- Car pool.
- If possible, avoid driving during the hours you would normally sleep (eg. 12am to 6am).
- When driving long distances, swap drivers or stay somewhere overnight.
- For more information on fatigue and driving, visit:
<http://www.ors.wa.gov.au>

Talk to your GP should symptoms of fatigue persist.

Staying awake for 17 hours leads to the same level of impaired performance as having a blood alcohol content of 0.05. Staying awake for 21 hours is equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.1%².

Contacts and support

For more information on fatigue and how it can affect your work, contact Worksafe on 1300 307 877 or www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe
 Office of Road Safety:
www.ors.wa.gov.au or 08 9222 9922
 Check whether your employer has a fatigue management policy.

References

1. Worksafe 2008, *Fatigue prevention in the workplace*, Victorian WorkCover Authority, <http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/resources/file/eb87fc08b727473/vwa_fatigue_handbook.pdf>
2. Queensland Government 2008, *Managing fatigue: a guide for the workplace*, Workplace health and safety, Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Queensland, <http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/resources/pdfs/fatigue_management.pdf>.
3. ATSB 2002, *Fatigue Related Crashes: An Analysis of Fatigue Related Crashes on Australian Roads using an Operational Definition of Fatigue*.

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