

# Injury Prevention

Managing fatigue in the workplace



# What is workplace fatigue?

Workplace fatigue is a constant or relapsing feeling of **physical, mental or emotional** exhaustion often leading to a loss of alertness and capacity to perform work duties safely.

Workers **most likely to experience fatigue** include:

- Shift workers
- Night workers
- Fly-in/fly-out workers
- On-call/call-back workers
- Frontline health workers

**Safety critical industries** include:

- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Mining and Resources
- Oil/Gas
- Transport

# Signs of fatigue

Physical	Mental	Emotional
Excessive yawning	Issues with short-term memory	Increase in irritable behaviour
Slowed blinking or excessive eye-rubbing	Difficulty maintaining interpersonal communications	Lack of motivation to perform tasks/duties
Reduced hand-eye coordination	Inability to concentrate	Withdrawn and reserved
Slow reflexes	Lapses in attention	Lacking energy
Microsleeps	Impaired decision making and judgement	Depressive symptoms
	Unexplained changes in behaviour	

# Consequences of fatigue

Fatigue can directly impact workers' safety by:

- Increasing likelihood of workplace accidents
- Negatively impacting personal health
- Decreasing general productivity
- Negatively impacting employee innovation, creativity and engagement
- Increasing worker absenteeism

# Causes of fatigue

Fatigue can be attributed to several causes at the **organisational** and **individual** levels

Organisational	Individual
Shift work	Pre-existing medical conditions
Tight work schedules	Medication use
Physical workplace environment	Concurrent infections
Poor work culture and leadership	Stress

# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Sleep Hygiene

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule – try get into and out of bed at the same time
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine, alcohol or exercise for 1–2 hours before sleeping
- Eat a light dinner at least 2 hours before bed; heavy meals interfere with the sleep cycle
- Keep your bedroom cool, dark and quiet
- Establish bedtime rituals e.g. hot shower or listening to soft music as a way to cue your body that it's time to start preparing for sleep
- Take up an activity that will make you tired e.g. reading

# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Exercise

Consistent exercise supports a faster metabolic system. The faster your metabolism, the more sleep time can be directed at repairing/replenishing the brain and other vital organs.

- Attempt at least 30 minutes of light exercise (e.g. jog, walk or bike) daily

# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Nutrition

The body follows an internal rhythm or 'clock' and typically prepares itself for food automatically at various times of the day (breakfast, lunch and dinner).

Any food consumed after dinner, is digested at a slow rate and disrupts the body's internal rhythm leading to downstream effects on sleep processes.

- Avoid eating large meals less than 2 hours before bed



# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Nicotine and alcohol

Studies have shown that smokers tend to sleep lightly and often wake up earlier due to nicotine withdrawal. Alcohol prevents individuals from entering the deep sleep stages.

- Avoid smoking or consuming alcohol for at least 2 hours before sleeping

# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Balancing your home environment

- Schedule quality time with your partner and/or kids
- Talk to loud neighbours to minimise the impact of noise on your sleep
- Create a bulletin board of you work roster so your household can plan group activities around your work schedule
- Limit screen time and opt for short walks, board games or reading instead

# Managing fatigue: Employee education

## Balancing your social life

- Inform your friends about your job requirements and what hours you typically work
- Be comfortable with saying 'no' to invites or leaving early in order to get adequate rest
- Plan your social events earlier in the day e.g. birthday breakfast instead of birthday dinner
- Talk to your Supervisor about what you have on. It is best that they are aware and have an understanding

# Managing fatigue: Work schedules

**Do not be afraid to talk to your supervisors/managers about:**

- Work loads e.g. pacing of work, suitability of work schedules and if you have any feelings of inadequacy towards your role
- Break times e.g. improvements to break areas and frequency/length of breaks
- Rest times between shifts
- Workplace culture e.g. do you feel pressure to work longer hours?

# Managing fatigue: Health checks

Regular health checks allow for early detection of work or non-work related health issues leading to better health outcomes in the long-term.

- Engage with your employer or GP and get regular monitoring for bone mass density, blood pressure, blood cholesterol, cancer screenings, diabetes, eye checks, kidney and liver check and mental health.