

Safety Scene You Are Getting Very, Very Sleepy...

Sufficient shut-eye plays an important role in day-to-day safety.



at a glance

- □ Many of us do not get enough sleep, which can lead to mistakes and poor job performance.
- □ Tips for dealing with fatigue at work include hydration, taking a quick break to refocus and napping.

by Molly E. Butz

ur schedules are always full. Talk to anyone around you and they have everything from their kids' soccer and softball games to a weekend full of backyard barbeques on their calendar. (And that's not including the extra hours, or even extra shifts, they are putting in at work.) We're spending more and more of our time doing a myriad of activities that don't include the one thing we could all use a little bit more of: sleep.

It's understandable, for certain. Why hit the hay when a new episode of CSI is about to start? And seriously, nobody would have passed up those choice tickets to see your favorite band, sports team, etc. Unfortunately, according to the National Sleep Foundation, our busy lives are cutting into the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep each night.¹ So much so that our lack of sleep is affecting our health, job performance and safety! With a limited number of hours in the day, it's important to understand how fatigue and sleep deprivation can affect every aspect of our lives and more importantly, how to squeeze in a few more winks.

In Sickness & in Health

It might surprise you to learn that not getting enough sleep can be the underlying cause in a number of potentially serious health concerns. However, studies have shown a correlation between lack of sleep and illness, from diabetes and heart disease to cancer. Additionally, getting less sleep can lead to weight gain or even obesity. Needless to say, too many sleepless nights might lead to an expanding waistline and an expanding list of health issues.

There are plenty of functions to maintain while we're awake, so it makes sense that our sleeping time is used to regulate and restore many of our body's systems. This down time allows us to feel relaxed and refreshed in the morning, prepared for a new day. Without this restorative time, the body is left to perform at a deficit.

Danger, Danger!

Unfortunately, this deficit can lead to more than medical concerns. If your job is lowrisk, say in an office building, the most common effects of fatigue on the job include everything from having a hard time concentrating to a generally lower level of alertness. And although these ailments might seem innocuous enough, poor job performance could lead to all kinds of concerns including job security. Mistakes on bids, truss design drawings or even simple office communications could be a disaster.

At an even bigger risk are folks whose on-the-job tasks require quick reaction time, manual dexterity and/or general alertness. Many positions in manufacturing require workers to use equipment that can become hazardous when being operated by a tired employee. In fact, some of the highest-profile historic disasters are thought to be linked to worker fatigue; think Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez oil spill.² And though it may seem easy to dismiss those major accidents, there are everyday jobs that can pose a threat if you're not getting enough sleep, such as operating a forklift or driving a delivery truck.

As long as we're talking about driving, it's important to point out that whether you're hauling a big load to a jobsite, or you're making your short commute to work, operAccording to the National Sleep Foundation, research has shown that severely sleep deprived people show "impairment equal to being legally drunk."

ating any vehicle while drowsy is danger-

ous. The frightening fact is that a lot of

us do it! The National Sleep Foundation's

2008 Sleep in America poll showed that

32 percent of the respondents reported

that they had driven drowsy at least once

per month during the past year.³ Worse

yet, more than one-third admitted to nod-

ding off behind the wheel!



- There are many reasons we aren't getting enough sleep. For some it's stress, others an overly-busy schedule, and for far too many people, one of a number of medical conditions is preventing those precious hours of shut eye. If you think you're one of the latter, see your doctor. Some medical conditions, such as sleep apnea, a prevalent sleeping disorder that causes its sufferers to stop breathing momentarily several times a night, can even be fatal. However, if you're one of many folks that simply have too much on their mind, or too much on their schedule, some simpler techniques can lead to better, longer sleep and easier, more productive days!
- Analyze: Take the time to think about the days when you feel the best and determine how much sleep you've gotten the night before. That should give you a good sense for how many hours a night you should get on a regular basis.
- Plan: If you know you need eight hours a night, rearrange your schedule and block off those hours for sleep. If it doesn't look like getting eight hours is a possibility, plan to take a nap at some point later in the day to get the rest. Thankfully you don't actually need to get all eight at one time! Keeping a consistent schedule is helpful, too!
- Exercise: Regular exercise is a great way to help your body in many ways including falling and staying asleep. Just keep in mind that exercising right before bed can make it harder to fall asleep, so try to finish your workout three hours before you plan to hit the sheets.
- Diet: As you may have suspected, foods containing stimulants like caffeine can affect how you sleep so limiting or elim-

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inating them from your diet can help. (It's also best to avoid nicotine in the evening as this can also disrupt your sleep.)

If you're still finding you're sleepy at work, a few more tips can help ease you through your day.

• Hydrate: Dehydration and sleeplessness are a bad combination; drink more water if you're feeling tired. Hydrating your body can help fight some of the effects of fatigue.

• Refocus: If you find your mind wandering, take a few minutes to get up, walk around a bit or grab a guick snack. If you're tired, getting the blood moving or diverting your thoughts from the task at hand for just a few moments can actually help you focus when you come back to the project. • Nap: If you're lucky enough to work for a company that allows for naps, dig in! If not, ask if you can combine your break times to catch a few winks. Two fifteen minute breaks make a nice half hour nap.

Everybody has a day here or there that requires sacrificing some sleeping time, but making that a habit, whether it's by choice or not, can have grave consequences. As a matter of fact, according to the National Sleep Foundation, research has shown that severely sleep deprived people show "impairment equal to being legally drunk." And no matter how you roll the dice, feeling tired all the time is no fun. So, keep yourself and those around you safe by getting back to bed! Safety first! SBC

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbcindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at <u>www.wtcatko.com</u>.

¹ www.sleepfoundation.org ² www.ntsb.gov/Publictn/1997/MAR9702.pdf ³ www.sleepfoundation.org/site/c.hulXKjM0lxF/b.3933533



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