

Sound Advice to Sleep On

New research shows that workers are not only getting less sleep than they should, they're getting less than they used to. In 2005, the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) estimated that overall U.S. adults are sleeping an average of 6.9 hours a night.

Sleep deprivation is becoming more prevalent due to the ever-increasing demands of personal and professional work life. People work all day and in the evening, they take more time to enjoy television, watch movies, or participate in other social activities.

The downside is that many people try to pack in too many activities, and end up feeling fatigued or sleep-deprived at work. And depending on the workplace, a lack of sleep can be dangerous - affecting judgment, health, and safety.

Some short term effects of sleep deprivation include:

- a decrease in daytime alertness by 32 percent due to a reduction of 1.5 hours of sleep for one night.
- a twofold risk of sustaining an occupational injury.
- decreased alertness, and impaired memory and cognitive ability.
- drowsy drivers responsible for at least 100,000 crashes, 71,000 injuries, and 1500 fatalities annually according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Some of the long term effects of sleep deprivation are:

- high blood pressure.
- heart attack.
- heart failure.
- stroke.
- obesity
- psychiatric problems.

Workers must assess how much sleep they need to perform optimally. If they haven't gotten enough sleep to function well at work, they should probably take the needed time to recuperate. Workers should pay attention for signs of lost concentration, and nodding off. A quick fix is to get up and stretch or walk around, or get a drink of water or grab a light snack.

Although workers' sleep habits are largely out of an employer's control, employers should educate workers on the effects of inadequate sleep and the resulting fatigue. Also, having an employee who is tired and works beyond a regular shift may increase the risk for injury.

The (NSF) suggests that individuals establish a regular sleep schedule, exercise during the day, and relax before bedtime. And for several hours before bedtime adhere to the following tips:

- Avoid heavy meals and caffeine.
- Consume less or avoid alcohol and nicotine.
- Drink fewer fluids that may disrupt sleep.
- Use caution with certain drugs or sleep aids as they can sometimes interfere with natural sleep.

Remember that worker fatigue due to inadequate rest is everyone's problem because it can affect more than the individual involved. Worker fatigue can have catastrophic safety or financial effects on families, businesses and even, depending on the job, the general public.

03/12

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