

## Who is at Risk for Fatigue?



Nearly everyone has experienced tiredness and an inability to function at an optimal level. But you may not realize just how much fatigue puts you and those around you at risk. Fatigue can happen to anyone, although some are more at risk than others.

### You Are Not Alone

“Fatigue” and “sleepiness” often are used synonymously, but they are not the same. Sleepiness is the physiological desire to sleep. Fatigue describes a physical, mental or social impairment that includes tiredness, sleepiness, reduced energy and increased effort needed to perform tasks at a desired level. People most at risk for fatigue and fatigue-related incidents include:

- Shift workers, especially those working night shift, rotating shifts, long hours or with early morning start times
- Workers who perform a task for extended periods or repeatedly perform a tedious task
- Individuals who get less than seven hours of sleep a night
- Individuals with untreated sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea
- Parents and caregivers of young children
- People taking certain medications that interfere with sleep

## Shift Work



About 15% to 20% of full-time employees work on shifts. Many suffer from a chronic loss of sleep, typically caused by a disruption in the body's circadian rhythm. In fact, one survey found that 62% of shift workers complain they cannot get enough sleep. Night-shift workers and those driving during nighttime hours are especially vulnerable.

The National Institute of General Medical Sciences says circadian rhythms are physical, mental and behavioral changes that follow a 24-hour cycle. Consequences of changes in sleep patterns are evident on and off the job, and include the inability to concentrate and memory loss.

Disturbance of the sleep-wake cycle is one of the key risk factors for safety incidents. The risk of safety incidents is 30% higher during night shifts compared to morning shifts. Disturbances of the sleep-wake cycle can also cause health problems, such as depression, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

## Long-duration Tasks

The time-on-task effect is a gradual increase in the amount of effort required to maintain the same level of performance on a task over time. For tasks that are cognitively demanding, a person has trouble maintaining the same level of vigilance, speed and accuracy over time. For tasks that are tedious, a person can struggle to maintain attention. Time-on-task fatigue can manifest as sleepiness, muscle tiredness or mental tiredness.

## Sleep Deprivation

### Rested Workers Create Safer Workplaces

Fatigue causes decreased performance capacity, which leads to an increase in injuries and fatalities in the workplace and on the roads. About 13% of work injuries are attributable to sleep problems, according to a study by Uehli and colleagues

(2014), and vehicle crashes, already the leading cause of death at work, can sometimes be attributed to fatigue.

Sleep is vital to human health and wellbeing. Let this be your wake-up call. We encourage employers to educate their employees on how they can protect themselves from fatigue and related problems.

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Falls are a leading cause of unintentional injury-related death at work. In 2018, 791 people died in falls from heights and from the same level at work. For working adults, depending on the industry, falls can be the leading cause of death.

### **Hazards in the Workplace**



Also in 2018, more than 240,000 people were injured badly enough in falls to require days off of work, according to [Injury Facts](#).

Construction workers are most at risk for fatal falls from height – more than seven times the rate of other industries – but falls can happen anywhere, even at a "desk job."

NSC data for 2018 measures deaths and injuries due to falls from height and falls on the same level, by industry, including:

- Construction: 10,650 injuries, 320 deaths
- Production: 17,160 injuries, 39 deaths
- Transportation and Material Moving: 45,730 injuries, 82 deaths
- Farming, Fishing and Forestry: 4,380 injuries, 17 deaths
- Building and Grounds Maintenance: 16,880 injuries, 99 deaths
- Healthcare: 13,600 injuries, 3 deaths

### **Falls are 100% Preventable**

Whether working from a ladder, roof or scaffolding, it's important to plan ahead, assess the risk and use the right equipment. First, determine if working from a height is absolutely necessary or if there is another way to do the task safely.

- Discuss the task with coworkers and determine what safety equipment is needed
- Make sure you are properly trained on how to use the equipment
- Scan the work area for potential hazards before starting the job
- Make sure you have level ground to set up the equipment
- If working outside, check the weather forecast; never work in inclement weather
- Use the correct tool for the job, and use it as intended
- Ensure stepladders have a locking device to hold the front and back open
- Always keep two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand on the ladder
- Place the ladder on a solid surface and never lean it against an unstable surface
- A straight or extension ladder should be 1 foot away from the surface it rests on for every 4 feet of height and extend at least 3 feet over the top edge
- Securely fasten straight and extension ladders to an upper support
- Wear slip-resistant shoes and don't stand higher than the third rung from the top
- Don't lean or reach while on a ladder, and have someone support the bottom
- Never use old or damaged equipment; check thoroughly before use

Millions of people are treated in emergency rooms for fall-related injuries every year. A fall can end in death or disability in a split second, but with a few simple precautions, you'll be sure stay safe at work.

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