



Fatigue

Poor job performance can be related to something that may have little to do with work: Fatigue. According to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), sleep deprivation is a widespread problem in America.

When workers have not had enough sleep, fatigue takes over. According to the 2002 NSF *Sleep in America* poll, over 80 percent of American adults link inadequate sleep with impaired daytime performance and behavior. More than 60 percent associate difficulty doing daily activities such as producing quality work, making carefully thought-out decisions, and listening carefully to others with not getting enough sleep. Most adults also believe that inadequate sleep can lead to making mistakes, being impatient, not getting along with others and can make a person more prone to unsafe behavior. Employers can confront the problem by letting their workers know about the hazards of sleep deprivation and what they can do to prevent it.

Fatigue can be hazardous

A good night's sleep has been characterized as fuel for the brain, and sleep is as important as proper nutrition and regular exercise. Those who have trouble getting enough sleep report a greater difficulty concentrating, accomplishing required tasks, and handling minor irritations.

There are many scientific investigations which have documented negative consequences of both short sleep duration and insomnia:

- Insomnia can lead to increased risk of depression; problems with memory, family/social relationships, and mood; poorer quality of life; increased health care costs; increased absenteeism; and increased risk for coronary disease.
- Insufficient sleep can lead to excessive sleepiness, negative mood changes, reduced performance on standardized tasks, increased accident risk, and acute negative effects on glucose metabolism and immune function.

Sleep apnea is a breathing disorder characterized by brief pauses of breathing during sleep. Snoring may be a sign of sleep apnea. The condition causes daytime sleepiness and poor concentration. Early detection and treatment for sleep apnea is important because it may be linked with irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration estimates that 100,000 car crashes each year are caused by drowsy drivers, resulting in at least 1,550 deaths and 40,000 injuries.

The 2002 NSF poll for the first time found large-scale "real world" evidence to link people's moods to their sleep habits. The poll's results suggest a direct correlation between more sleep and heightened daytime alertness with positive feelings that include a sense of peace, satisfaction with life, and being full of energy. Shorter sleep periods and greater indications of daytime sleepiness were related to negative moods such as anger, stress, pessimism, and fatigue.

There are many reasons to urge people to obtain adequate sleep and to discuss insomnia with a doctor.

Many are suffering

According to the 2002 NSF poll, only about one-third of the nation's adults get the recommended eight or more hours of sleep each night. In addition, 58 percent say they experience insomnia a few nights a week or more.

Symptoms of insomnia can include difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings during the night, waking too early and being unable to go back to sleep, or waking unrefreshed. If insomnia symptoms persist, it is important to seek medical help.

Sleep apnea is more common in men, but it occurs in both sexes and all age groups. It is estimated that 18 million adults have sleep apnea.

A study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that significant risk factors for drowsy driving included working more than one job, working the night shift, and being awake for more than 20 hours. Half of American drivers say they have driven while drowsy, according to the NSF poll, and about 20 percent say they have fallen asleep at the wheel. About 25 percent of the respondents said they drove to or from work at least a few days a month while feeling drowsy, and four percent said they drive to work feeling drowsy almost every day.

The 2002 NSF poll also found that Americans are concerned about the impact that sleepiness and fatigue can have on certain professionals whose level of alertness is necessary for public health and safety. For example, 86 percent said they would be anxious about their safety if they learned their surgeon had been on duty 24 consecutive hours.

The poll found widespread public support for limiting work hours for physicians, nurses, airline pilots, truck drivers, and the police. Specifically, the poll found that:

- 70 percent believed the maximum number of hours worked each day by a doctor should be 10 or less.

- 86 percent agreed that a pilot should be allowed to take a nap to overcome drowsiness while flying if another qualified pilot can take over, and 63 percent said a pilot's maximum workday should be eight hours or less.
- Almost 50 percent supported limiting workdays of police officers, truck drivers, and nurses to a maximum of eight hours.

Terrorism adds to the problem

The events of September 11 had a dramatic impact on the quality of Americans' sleep, according to the 2002 NSF poll, which found nearly one-half of respondents reporting symptoms of insomnia as they tried to sleep in the nights immediately following the attacks. Women had more difficulty sleeping than men during this time.

Sleep problems frequently experienced by those polled in the immediate aftermath of September 11 included: difficulty falling asleep (44 percent), awakenings during the night (48 percent), and waking up feeling unrefreshed (50 percent). Nearly two out of five respondents (39 percent) said they awakened too early and couldn't get back to sleep. Each of these sleep problems is characterized as a symptom of insomnia by sleep experts.

Stress or anxiety was by far the leading cause of frequent night awakenings for poll respondents in the wake of September 11. Among those who reported an inability to sleep through the night, 71 percent attributed the problem to stress or anxiety, while fear (33 percent), depression (32 percent), and bad dreams (23 percent) were other reasons cited.

In spite of their sleep problems, however, more than one-half of respondents (51 percent) rated the quality of their sleep as good or better immediately after September 11, while 47 percent said their sleep was fair or poor. Surprisingly, there was no statistical difference by region in the quality of people's sleep. In fact, respondents in the Northeast were more likely to say their sleep was "very good" or better during this time than those in the Midwest, South, and West (31 percent vs. 15 percent vs. 20 percent vs. 28 percent).

By contrast, when asked about the quality of their sleep over the entire past year, nearly three-fourths (74 percent) of those polled said their sleep was good to excellent while 28 percent said it was fair or poor during this time. Respondents reported significantly fewer symptoms of insomnia throughout the past year than they did in the nights immediately following September 11.

Help is available

A few simple lifestyle changes can help most people get close to the recommended eight hours of uninterrupted quality sleep they need each night for optimum health, safety, and productivity. Here are some suggestions from NSF's sleep experts:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule — go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends.
- Create a sleep-friendly environment — make the bedroom cool, quiet, and dark.
- Engage in a relaxing, non-alerting activity at bedtime — read, listen to music, or soak in a hot tub.
- Limit eating and drinking before bedtime — avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol, but have a light snack to ease hunger pains.
- Exercise regularly — preferably in the afternoon, but not too close to bedtime.
- Take a nap — a short 20-30 minute nap can help promote short-term alertness, but don't substitute a daytime nap for a good night's sleep.
- Get in bed only when you're tired — if you can't fall asleep within 15 minutes, go into another room to relax until you're sleepy.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), drivers should recognize these warning signs of drowsy driving:

- You can't stop yawning.
- You have trouble keeping your eyes open and focused, especially at stop lights.
- Your mind wanders, or you have disconnected thoughts.
- You can't remember driving the last few miles.
- Your driving becomes sloppy — you weave between lanes, tailgate, miss traffic signals, or hit the grooves or rumble strips on the side of the road.

The NHTSA says the following **won't** keep you awake while driving:

- Turning up the volume of the radio.
- Singing loudly.
- Chewing gum or eating food.
- Getting out of the car and running around.
- Slapping yourself.
- Sticking your head out the window.

The NHTSA offers these tips for avoiding drowsy driving:

- Avoid driving home from work if you're drowsy. Some experts recommend drinking two cups of coffee, then taking a short 15- to 20

minute nap before you drive.

- Avoid alcohol or any medications that could make you drowsy.
- Carpool if possible so that you're driving with someone else awake in the car.
- Take public transportation or a taxi.
- Pull off the road to a safe place if you hit a rumble strip — it's a sure sign that you are drowsy and need to take a nap or get some coffee.

The NSF emphasizes that substantial research serves as the basis for the recommendation that adults obtain an average of seven to nine hours of sleep each night, recognizing that each person has an individual requirement for his/her own amount of sleep.

If lifestyle changes aren't enough to keep you from having trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early — or if you are a chronic snorer — see a doctor. A physician or a sleep specialist can prescribe treatment that is right for you.

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