

Sleep Deprivation Deprives You of Safety Too

Feeling overworked? You're not alone. Whether as a result of working long hours, extra jobs, or spending too long watching late-night television, many workers are getting less sleep than they need. Sleep deprivation is a serious safety issue. Not only does a poor night's sleep impact productivity; sleep deprivation can cause people to be less focused and attentive, leading to serious lapses in judgment.

What's at Stake?

The real danger occurs when a sleep-deprived person shows up at work not realizing how tired he or she actually is and proceeds to work as normal. Depending on the job, a tired worker can put himself and the public in critical danger. Tired truck drivers may nod off and swerve into traffic; sleepy office clerks may make frustrating accounting errors, and fatigued construction workers can make serious errors on building projects.

What Can Go Wrong?

A sole air traffic controller scheduled for a late night shift shows up for work haggard and exhausted. He falls asleep at the controls and is out of communication for 16 minutes, missing an urgent call from a pilot who has a critically ill passenger on board. Fortunately, the pilot is able to safely land after getting last-minute assistance from a regional radar facility. However, the air traffic controller, once roused from his nap, is terminated.

How to Protect Yourself:

You may suffer from sleep deprivation if you experience these symptoms:

- Mood changes, such as becoming suddenly snippy or irritable
- Lapses in memory
- Frequent sleepiness
- Diminished motor skills

You may suffer from sleep deprivation if you experience these symptoms:

- Examine your off-work activities to see how they may be impacting your sleep. Stay away from caffeine in the late afternoon and evenings. If you can, exercise during the day and relax right before bedtime.
- Evaluate your bedroom. Your room should be free of light while you're sleeping, so consider using blackout curtains or a sleep mask if necessary. Check for noisy distractions (including television, computers, or a partner's loud snoring).
- Avoid heavy meals just before bedtime. Also reduce your intake of alcohol and nicotine, especially in the hours leading up to bedtime.
- If needed, take a vacation day so that you are refreshed when you return to work.
- Try not to work beyond your scheduled shift.

Final Word

What you do after-hours can affect your work performance the next day. Make sure you get enough sleep and be wary of sleepy co-workers who could be jeopardizing your safety.