Worker Wellness & Safety: How Health-Behaviours Affect Incident Risk Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Most safety programs focus on equipment, procedures, and hazards in the environment. But the person doing the work is part of the equation too. How much sleep you got last night, whether you’ve been drinking enough water, the medication you took this morning — all of it affects how your brain and body perform on the job. When your mind is foggy or your reaction time is slow, hazards you’d normally spot and dodge become the ones that get you.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

The dangers that come from health-related impairment are hard to see from the outside, but they show up in the moment that counts. They’re worth knowing because they’re also within your control.

Sleep Deprivation

Research consistently shows that going without sleep for 18 hours impairs your reaction time, judgment, and coordination to a level comparable to a blood alcohol level of 0.05%. Many workers show up chronically under-slept and don’t even realize how much it’s costing them.

Dehydration

- Losing just 2% of your body weight in fluids causes measurable drops in concentration and coordination
- Dehydration increases fatigue, makes you irritable, and slows your response to danger
- It can happen quickly in hot environments, during high-exertion tasks, or even in air-conditioned spaces

Poor Nutrition

Skipping meals or eating poorly before a shift affects blood sugar levels, which directly impacts focus and energy. A worker who hasn’t eaten is more likely to feel dizzy, make poor decisions, or react slowly to an unexpected situation. A good meal before a shift isn’t a luxury. It’s part of showing up ready to work safely.

Substance Use and Medications

- Alcohol and recreational drugs impair judgment and reaction time long after the visible effects wear off
- Many common prescription and over-the-counter medications cause drowsiness, dizziness, or difficulty concentrating
- If a medication warns against operating heavy machinery, that warning applies to your job

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

You don’t have to be in perfect health to work safely, but you do have to be honest with yourself and with your crew. These habits make a real difference.

Prioritize Sleep

Aim for 7 to 9 hours before a shift. If you’re working rotating shifts or irregular hours, be extra deliberate about your sleep schedule. A short nap before a night shift can help. Sleep debt builds over time and doesn’t disappear with one good night.

Stay Hydrated on the Job

- Drink water before your shift starts, not just when you’re thirsty
- Keep a water bottle accessible throughout the day and refill it regularly
- In the heat, aim for about a cup of water every 15 to 20 minutes during physical work
- Coffee and energy drinks don’t replace water and can actually increase dehydration over time

Eat Before You Go In

Don’t start a physical shift on an empty stomach. Even something simple like a piece of fruit, some protein, and complex carbohydrates will stabilize your blood sugar and help you stay sharp. Pack food if you know breaks will be short or unpredictable. Your brain runs on fuel the same way your equipment does.

Know What Your Medications Do

Before any shift, check whether your medications list drowsiness, dizziness, or impaired coordination as side effects. Talk to your pharmacist if you’re unsure. If a new medication is affecting how you feel on the job, tell your supervisor so tasks can be adjusted while you find the right dose.

Speak Up When You’re Not at 100%

This is the most important habit on this list. If you’re not feeling right, whether from illness, a rough night, a medication, or something personal, say something before the shift gets dangerous. You’re not letting anyone down by speaking up. You’re keeping yourself and your crew safe.

FINAL WORD

Your body is your most important piece of safety equipment, and it needs maintenance just like everything else on the site. Take care of it, be honest about how you’re feeling, and speak up when something’s off.