



Fatigue

INTRODUCTION

Many people ignore or simply do not recognize the symptoms of fatigue. Fatigue is the result of the body being physically or mentally exhausted; in extreme cases, it can lead to significant reduction of a person's physical and mental abilities. It is one of the leading causes of injury in the workplace and at home.

Fatigue and its factors

Fatigue is a decreased capacity or complete inability of a person to function normally because of excessive stimulation or prolonged exertion. Many factors may affect the level of fatigue a person may experience such as long work hours and interrupted or low quality sleep. A few factors that may lead to the body becoming fatigued are listed below. When these factors are combined, the level of fatigue increases.

- Sleep quality and duration
- Sleep deprivation or large sleep debt
- Inconsistent sleep/wake cycle, rotating shifts
- Diet and nutrition habits of an individual
- Change of diet, including short changes of nutrition habits, such as during vacations and social gatherings
- Work tasks (physical and mental exertion)
- Platform stability (firm ground versus moving ship)
- Individual demographics such as age, physical condition and health
- Working for prolonged periods of time (periods longer than 12 hours)
- Periods of high stress
- Harsh working conditions such as: extreme temperature, high noise levels and excessive vibration

Common fatigue misconceptions

There are many common misconceptions related to fatigue. A few examples are listed below.

- Sleeping during the day is not as fulfilling as sleeping at night - this is incorrect
- Fatigue and stress are the same thing - stress is an emotional state while fatigue is a physical state though it is true that stress and fatigue can influence each other
- Quantity is more important than quality of sleep - both the quantity and quality of sleep are equally important
- If you have slept then you should be alert - the length and quality of the sleep, as well as the previous level of fatigue, determine the alertness of the individual upon waking

- Fatigue is easily self-monitored - most people suffering from fatigue are usually unaware of it until it is too late to do anything
- Coffee is a great cure for fatigue - although coffee may help delay the onset of fatigue, its effect is short lived

Actual Injury Report

A crew member had a major car accident during the early hours of the morning (approximately 0400) while driving to attend a survey. The crew member suffered multiple injuries, including a broken leg, ribs, and neck. Driving while fatigued can result in severe consequences as evidenced in this case. Crew members experiencing fatigue should postpone a pending survey to allow time for rest or make arrangements for non-fatigued personnel to drive to the location.

Symptoms of fatigue

Individuals suffering from fatigue may not realize they are experiencing symptoms until it is too late; therefore it is important to be on the lookout for signs of fatigue in the people around us. Some of the signs and symptoms of fatigue are listed below.

- Instability while walking, e.g. stumbling
- Drooping eyes
- Reduced short-term and long-term memory
- Slurred or slowed speech
- Irritability
- Decreased reaction time
- Short attention span
- Drooping head and uncontrollable yawning
- Increased risk tolerance (such as omitting tasks)

Some symptoms can be identified by the individual experiencing fatigue. Listed below are a few self-diagnosing symptoms of fatigue.

- Burning or itching eyes
- Moodiness
- Trembling hands
- Trouble thinking
- Headaches
- Heavy eyelids, troubling focusing
- Back, neck and muscle pain
- Difficulty waking up

Combating fatigue

Because fatigue is a serious issue and can lead to accidents and injuries it is important to know how to combat fatigue. Some suggestions are listed below.



FATIGUE

- Get at least six to eight uninterrupted hours of sleep before starting a work shift
- If possible sleep at the same time each day
- Individuals sleeping during the day should find a dark, cool, quiet location and use earplugs to block out any noise
- Take scheduled work breaks
- Replenish resources such as proteins and sugars for muscles and fats and minerals for the brain and nerves
- Do not eat large quantities before bed; this may cause trouble sleeping
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and cigarettes; these substances can cause sleep disturbances
- Regular exercise, such as walking and aerobics, can increase stamina and help individuals fall asleep faster

If there is a significant amount of work for a call out, do not hesitate to ask the lead crew member or supervisor for additional assistance. When no one else is available, do not commit to performing work if the task is too extensive to be carried out by one person.

Actual Near Miss

A crew member carried out an inspection of seven big blocks at various subcontractors in excessive heat, causing the crew member to perspire profusely. After completing the inspection, the crew member was returning home when he started to experience severe cramps in his thighs and calves; the crew member was not injured due to this situation. When working in situations that may cause fatigue, crew members should take the necessary rest breaks to replenish themselves before continuing to work or drive.

Discussion

- Report and discuss any incidents pertaining to fatigue with your supervisor.

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