

# Sleep News

## Employers can take steps to limit the risks associated with lack of alertness:

- Educate workers about good sleep hygiene.
- Train vehicle and heavy equipment operators to recognize and respect signs of fatigue, such as frequent blinking and yawning.
- Encourage fatigued employees to break for brief naps, caffeine, fresh air, or a healthful snack. (While not a substitute for adequate sleep, these measures can increase short-term alertness.)
- Choose health insurance providers who cover conditions related to sleep disorders.



5821 Fairview Road,  
Suite 409  
Charlotte, NC 28209

1630 Campus Park Drive,  
Unit C  
Monroe, NC 28112

212 Le Phillip Court,  
Suite 105  
Concord, NC 28025

9801 West Kincey Ave.,  
Suite 120  
Huntersville, NC 28078

825 North Fourth Street  
Albemarle, NC 28001

704-377-5337

## Effect of Sleep Deprivation on the Work Place

Chances are you've experienced the brain fog that follows a poor night's sleep. Now imagine getting through every day with that feeling. Millions of sleep-deprived Americans put themselves and others in harm's way on a regular basis. Some of them may be in your workforce.

According to a National Sleep Foundation (NSF) 2000 survey, 51 percent of people report that workplace sleepiness interferes with the amount of work they accomplish. Forty percent admit their quality of work suffers when they are sleepy, and nearly one in five report making occasional or frequent work errors due to sleepiness.

Amount and quality of sleep have a direct bearing on emotional and physical well-being. Lack of sleep has been linked to the following:

- chronic irritability, depression and memory lapse
- difficulty in communication, decision making and problem solving
- increased risk of accidents and injury
- increased risk of gastrointestinal illnesses, heart disease, hypertension and obesity
- relationship issues
- shortened life span

In the workplace, these negative effects can decrease productivity and cause accidents. In 1997, the NSF estimated the direct costs of sleepiness and lost productivity to U.S. businesses to be approxi-

mately \$18 billion. Factor in indirect costs from absenteeism and workplace accidents, and the cost may approach \$150 billion.

Physical factors that interfere with sleep include certain medications, hormonal shifts, pain, restless leg syndrome (involuntary limb movements) and sleep apnea (momentary lapses in breathing that cause mini-awakenings). Psychological factors - such as stress, lifestyle, and irregular schedules - also rob sleep. Environmental factors - including comfort, noise, temperature, and jet lag - contribute as well.

Experts recommend adults get at least eight hours of sleep in order to function properly. However our 24/7 society assigns sleep such a low priority that one-third of American adults sleep only 6.5 hours or less during the workweek. And 45 percent agree they will sleep less to accomplish more. So while going to the gym is a healthy habit, stealing an hour's sleep to do so isn't. Likewise for staying up past a reasonable bedtime to shop or surf the Web.

A 15 to 20 minute nap can improve alertness, sharpen memory, and generally reduce symptoms of fatigue. Yet the NSF found that only 16 percent of adults work for employers who endorse worksite napping.

Shift workers are especially prone to inadequate sleep.



After fighting the natural wake-sleep pattern to stay alert on the job, they may have trouble falling and staying asleep during daylight hours. Family and personal obligations that must be met during the day also interfere with sleep.

These tips can help meet the special needs of shiftworkers:

- Install bright lights in the work area to signal the body to stay alert.
- Institute a 'buddy system' to promote alertness and awareness of fatigue.
- Remind workers to perform their most demanding tasks early in their shift.
- Form a support group where workers can exchange ideas.
- Encourage taking public transportation or a brief nap before driving home.

Also, suggest that employees wear wraparound sunglasses for the trip home to prevent resetting their body's internal clock. Avoid assigning overtime, whenever possible, to night shift workers.

Written by:  
**Hemanth Rao, MD**, Chairman  
of United Sleep Medicine and  
Cognos Healthcare