



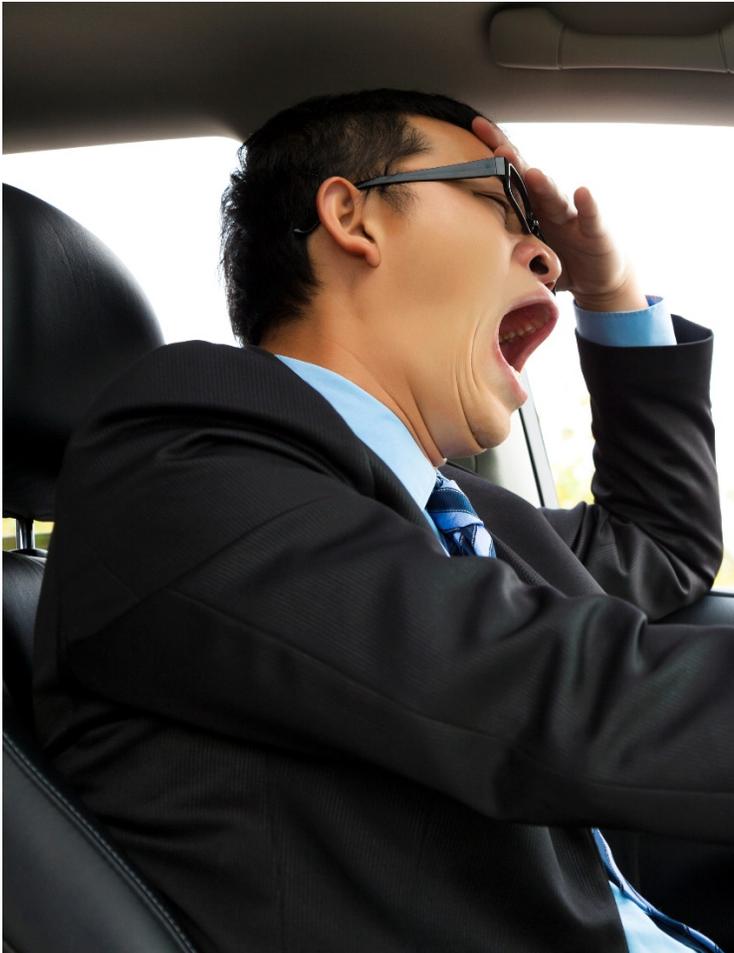
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## STRUGGLING TO KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN?

# HOW FATIGUE CAN HARM YOUR BODY AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

No matter how mindful and focused we are, fatigue can catch up with us.

According to a recent poll by Decima Research, one-third of Canadians spend three to 10 hours a week struggling to keep their eyes open at work. The obvious answer is to get more sleep, but it's not always that simple.



### HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU FIGHT THE EFFECTS OF FATIGUE:

- Create a sleep sanctuary and get a good night's sleep
- Limit intake of coffee and artificial stimulants
- Drink plenty of water
- Strive for work-life balance
- Exercise, but not within 3 hours of sleeping
- Try to remain positive
- Rest and take breaks during the day
- Meditate, don't medicate
- Nap, only if necessary
- Seek medical attention if necessary

# DANGERS TO BEING FATIGUED ON THE JOB

We all know about the risks of fatigue on the job – the Chernobyl and Three-Mile Island nuclear disasters (Mitler, et al., 1988 ), the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident (Mitler, et al., 1988 ), and the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 (Haycox, 2012) have all been linked to sleepy workers. But fatigue doesn't go away after work hours. It can also be an issue in daily life. Fatigue is a major cause of auto accidents, it can impact your family life, your body weight, and has even been linked to Alzheimer's disease.

Researchers are starting to unlock the secrets of how sleep deprivation affects the body. It can contribute to impacts on cancer, Alzheimer's disease, obesity and poor school results. One study has shown that cancer cells injected into rats spread far more quickly if the animals were sleep deprived. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015) A restful sleep may be just as crucial as stopping smoking when it comes to improving health.

Sleep deprivation can also lead to obesity because it can affect blood glucose levels that could predispose you to adult-onset diabetes. One study showed that people who have had four nights of just getting four hours of sleep a night consumed on average about 500 calories more than people who were well rested at a free buffet.

## WATCH FOR THE SIGNS

You know the obvious ones: yawning, drooping eyelids, head dropping. But there are also secondary signs, including digestive problems, difficulty concentrating and lapses in attention. Have you ever answered the phone, taken a message for a family member and then completely forgotten to deliver that message? Or forgotten an important appointment? Fatigue could be the culprit. It can create an inability to focus or handle multiple tasks at the same time. It can even cause you to disengage from your family, which can lead to emotional problems or depression. In 2005, a study published in the journal *Sleep* found people with insomnia were nearly ten times more likely to have clinically significant depression than others. The same study showed insomniacs were also more than 17 times more likely to suffer from anxiety.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

No matter how mindful and focused we are, fatigue can catch up with us.

According to a recent poll by Decima Research, one-third of Canadians spend three to 10 hours a week struggling to keep their eyes open at work. The obvious answer is to get more sleep, but it's not always that simple. Here are some tips to help you fight the effects of fatigue.

- **Create a sleep sanctuary and get a good night's sleep.** Adequate quantity and quality of sleep as the key to managing fatigue. Reserve your bedroom for sleep, intimacy, and other restful activities, like meditation or reading. Keep the room cool, dark for sleeping and quiet. Keep electronics away.
- **Limit coffee and artificial stimulants,** especially before bedtime. In the long run, ingesting these stimulants throws off the body's natural ability to stay alert and focused. Drink plenty of water
- **Strive for work-life balance,** allowing yourself time to recharge for the next work day.

- **Stay Hydrated.** Don't allow yourself to become dehydrated. It can drain you of your energy. Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- **Exercise, but not within 3 hours of sleep.** It may seem counterintuitive to exercise when you are tired, but it will increase blood flow, which supplies oxygen to your body and brain, and it will energize you.
- **Try to remain positive.** A chronically anxious, negative attitude repeatedly activates the stress response system, which can cause fatigue.
- **Rest and take breaks during the day.** Periodically resting allows time for the body to repair itself and prevent becoming overtired. Take breaks during the day, whether at work or home on the weekends. Pacing yourself can restore your energy and prevent over-exertion.
- **Meditate, don't medicate.** Meditation has been proven to reduce anxiety, which may be keeping you awake at night. It also promotes relaxation, beats stress and helps alleviate symptoms of depression.
- **Nap, only if necessary.** Even a brief sleep can improve performance for several hours following the nap. However, naps can also interfere without sleep schedule and ability to sleep at night.
- **Seek medical attention if necessary.** If you think you are getting enough sleep but do not feel refreshed in the morning, you may want to speak to a medical professional. Fatigue can be caused by insomnia, infections, heart conditions, respiratory problems or depression. These are treatable.

## RESOURCES

Visit PSHSA's [Fatigue in the Workplace](#) page

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