

Where it's all about you

Cited as the root cause of many significant accidents including the Clapham Junction rail disaster, Chernobyl, the Texas City Oil Refinery Explosion, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill and the loss of the Challenger space shuttle, fatigue has gained so much limelight when dealing with behavioural-based safety. To prevent such risks and effects of exhaustion, management and people need to work together. However, the only cure for fatigue is sleep, but it's best not to get fatigued in the first place.

Fatigue is a state of feeling very tired, exhausted, weary, or sleepy. This results from a lack of sleep and can be heightened from prolonged mental activity or long periods of stress or anxiety. Boring or repetitive tasks can also increase feelings of tiredness. The immediate signs and symptoms of fatigue, includes tiredness or sleepiness, memory lapses, difficulty concentrating and slower reaction times. All this is translated into reduced ability to make decisions, poor communication skills, reduced attention, reduced ability to handle stress, slow reaction time as well as poor performance and productivity. All these manifestations tend to escalate into increased errors in judgement, increased sick time, absenteeism, and rate of turnover, increased medical costs.

In a workplace, to get ready of such circumstances, management should:

- Manage the workplace environment and practices to minimise the factors that could contribute to fatigue. Make sure employees understand why they need to manage the risk of fatigue and how to minimise their fatigue level. Encourage staff to manage their personal out of work fatigue risk factors.

Likewise, employees should:

- Work with the employer to manage fatigue-related risks in the workplace by, varying work tasks so you stay alert, taking regular breaks and notifying your supervisor or manager if you're feeling fatigued.
- It is also advisable that when you are outside of work as an employee:
 - Make sleep a priority, improve the quality and quantity of your sleep.
 - Have a regular bed time routine, make sure your bedroom is dark, cool and comfortable.
 - Get treatment for sleep disorders, choose what you eat and drink carefully: eat light nutritious meals (heavy meals make you drowsy); drink plenty of water; minimise your caffeine and alcohol intake as well learn the warning signs of fatigue and to recognise them in yourself, so that you can take a break or have a powernap.