

Fatigue

Fatigue refers to mental or physical exhaustion that stops a person from being able to function normally. It is more than simply feeling tired or drowsy. It is caused by prolonged periods of physical and/or mental exertion without enough time to rest and recover. It may also be due to a medical issue. Fatigue is generally associated with spending long periods of time awake or having an inadequate amount and/or quality of sleep over an extended period. It can significantly affect an individual's capacity to function. Its side-effects include decreased performance and productivity, and increased potential for errors of judgement and injuries to occur

Fatigue management is a responsibility that must be shared between persons controlling work and workers - it involves factors that occur both in and outside of the workplace

Common workplace issues that can cause fatigue include:

- **Shift work** – the human body is designed to sleep during the night. This pattern is set by a small part of the brain known as the circadian clock. A shift worker confuses their circadian clock by working when their body is programmed to be asleep.
- **Poor workplace practices** – can add to a person's level of fatigue. These may include long work hours, hard physical labour, irregular working hours (such as rotating shifts), stressful work environment (such as excessive noise or temperature extremes), boredom, working alone with little or no interaction with others, or fixed concentration on a repetitive task.
- **Workplace stress** – can be caused by a wide range of factors including job dissatisfaction, heavy workload, conflicts with bosses or colleagues, bullying, constant change, or threats to job security.
 - **Burnout** – can be described as striving too hard in one area of life while neglecting everything else. 'Workaholics', for example, put all their energies into their career, which puts their family life, social life and personal interests out of balance.
 - **Unemployment** – financial pressures, feelings of failure or guilt, and the emotional exhaustion of prolonged job hunting can lead to stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue.

If you are experiencing fatigue it is important to identify the factors that are contributing to the fatigue, discuss the issue with your employer, make changes as required (including sleeping patterns, workload, roster and lifestyle behaviours), and seek professional help if necessary. Speaking to your GP can also be helpful.

If you would like support to assist you understanding fatigue or similar issues please contact **Working Life** on +61 1300 369 072 or email mail@working-life.net