



Sleep deprivation and work performance

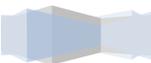
The National Sleep Foundation's 2005 Sleep in America Poll showed that U.S. adults are sleeping an average 6.9 hours a night, including both weekday and weekend sleep. These averages are down by two hours from the same poll done in 2003. The number of hours spent sleeping on both weekdays and weekends continues to trend downward.

There are several short-term consequences associated with sleep deprivation:

- Sleep deprivation induces significant reductions in performance and alertness. Reducing your nighttime sleep by as little as 1.5 hours for just one night could result in a reduction of daytime alertness by as much as 32 percent.
- Decreased alertness and excessive daytime sleepiness impair your memory and your ability to think and process information.
- Disruption of a bed partner's sleep due to a sleep disorder may cause significant problems for the relationship such as; separate bedrooms, conflicts, and moodiness.
- You may experience a poor quality of life. Participating in certain activities that require sustained attention, like going to the movies, seeing your child in a school play, or watching a favorite TV show may become more difficult due to sleep deprivation.
- Excessive sleepiness also contributes to a greater than twofold higher risk of sustaining an occupational injury.
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates conservatively that each year drowsy drivers are responsible for at least 100,000 automobile crashes, 71,000 injuries, and 1,550 fatalities.

In the long term, untreated sleep disorders are associated with many serious illnesses, including:

- Heart attack
- High blood pressure
- Heart failure
- Stroke
- Obesity
- Injury from accidents
- Psychiatric problems, including depression and other mood disorders
- Mental impairment
- Fetal and childhood growth retardation
- Disruption of bed partner's sleep quality
- Poor quality of life



Seventy million American's have some type of sleep disorder and 33 percent of people have symptoms of insomnia. However, less than 10 percent of those are identified by primary care physicians. Sleep-related breathing disorders represent abnormalities that range from simple snoring to sleep. As highly prevalent as they are, most cases remain undiagnosed and untreated.

The Sleep-deprived Employee

Sleep deprivation negatively affects work performance—productivity and quality—and working relationships. Without adequate sleep, employees have more difficulty concentrating, learning, and communicating. Memory lapses increase. Problem-solving abilities decline. Sleep-deprived employees can be moody and less tolerant of co-workers' differing opinions, making them more prone to reactionary outbursts and other relationship-destroying behaviors. Work relationship problems impact the entire organization. They contribute to inefficiency and job dissatisfaction.

Clearly, sleep deprivation causes serious problems in both personal life and the workplace. It often is cited as a primary or secondary cause of industrial and motor vehicle accidents. It also has been cited as a reason for unscheduled absenteeism, which is at a five-year high.

Work and relationship problems increase stress levels, which in turn can exacerbate sleep problems. Combine sleep problems, added stress and the anxiety sleep deprivation sufferers feel as they approach bedtime and the situation can appear hopeless. The important information to provide your employee with is that once diagnosed, most sleep disorders can be corrected.



Improving Your Sleep

Documenting your sleep in a sleep diary each day for one or two weeks will help you identify patterns or conditions that might be preventing you from getting enough sleep. The diary also can help you articulate just what is happening with your sleep should you decide to consult a physician or sleep disorder specialist.

Below are tips to help you improve your sleep:

- Maintain a regular bed and wake time schedule, including weekends.
- Establish a regular, relaxing bedtime routine, such as soaking in a hot bath or hot tub and then reading a book or listening to soothing music.
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool.
- Sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress and comfortable pillows. Make sure they are allergen-free.
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex.
- Finish eating at least two to three hours before your regular bedtime.
- Exercise regularly. It is best to complete your workout at least a few hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine such as coffee, tea, soda, chocolate close to bedtime.
- Avoid nicotine found in cigarettes and other tobacco products close to bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol close to bedtime. Although many people think of alcohol as a sedative, it actually disrupts sleep, causing nighttime awakenings.

Determining Your Risk

Although many sleep-deprived people are very much aware that they have sleep problems, some aren't. Some believe they can get by and function at a high level on very little sleep, which is the exception rather than the rule. Answering the following questions compiled from various sleeping quizzes can help you determine if you're getting enough sleep or if you may have a sleep disorder:

- Do you often watch the late show because you can't fall asleep? Or do you frequently wake up during the night and can't go back to sleep?
- Are you often cranky? Or do you have trouble thinking at work?
- Are you experiencing a lot of stress in your life?
- Do you have high blood pressure?
- Do you snore?
- Are you sleepy during the day?
- Are you overweight?
- Do you wake up with morning headaches?
- Do you find it hard to stay awake while driving, watching TV, reading a book or in meetings?
- Do you ever wake up choking, gasping for air, or have a skipping or rapid heartbeat during the night?
- Has anyone told you that you hold your breath, snort, and often move during sleep?

Answering yes to two or more questions can indicate a possible sleep disorder.

To educate your employees on the importance of quality sleep, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5018 or Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com.

