

Fatigue Among Your Shift Workers

It is difficult to adjust to shift work, and the unconventional schedule takes a toll on your workers.

Research shows that people who sleep during the day have lower quality sleep, and often struggle to get an adequate amount of sleep. Plus, workers on a night shift schedule tend to have poor eating habits and lack regular exercise, which can also contribute to sleep problems, fatigue and stress.

Dangers of Fatigue

Fatigue due to poor quality or lack of sleep affects every aspect of an individual's life, and can severely hamper one's ability to perform at work. Fatigue causes drowsiness, moodiness, lack of concentration and focus, increased stress and impaired hand-eye coordination. These symptoms prevent employees from performing their job at their highest capable level and also cause a serious safety hazard in many situations. In addition, employees experiencing fatigue are a danger to themselves and others during their commute, especially on their way home after a shift.

Shift workers also tend to have more gastrointestinal and other health problems due to their unusual sleep and eating schedule. This includes a higher prevalence of depression,

anxiety and sleep disorders such as insomnia or sleep apnea.

Help Employees Avoid Fatigue

All of the problems discussed above can greatly limit your employees' productivity, increase their health care costs and reduce their overall quality of life. Fortunately there are ways that you can help your workers live healthier lives and get better sleep, which will both increase employee satisfaction and reduce the burden on your bottom line.

- Educate your employees on the importance of enough sleep, nutritious eating and regular exercise.
 - Good eating and exercise habits will help them sleep better and have more energy while they're awake.
 - Talking to family and friends about their schedule can help them ensure they're getting the sleep they need.
 - Encourage employees to see a doctor if they continue to struggle with sleep or think

they have a sleep-related disorder or health complication.

- Provide adequate breaks and health food options during each shift. If employees are feeling drowsy, recommend a healthy snack or a short brisk walk to re-energize.
- Enforce strict safety procedures, including monitoring for drowsiness in safety-sensitive positions.
- Ensure reasonable shift length and frequency, and have sensible overtime procedures so that employees are not overwhelmed with their schedule.
- Use care when rotating shift schedules. Rotating schedules can be beneficial, to let employees also work daytime shifts. However, rotating shifts too frequently does more harm than good because the body doesn't have time to adjust—making sleep, fatigue and health problems even worse.

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