



# Toolbox Talk

## Topic: Fatigue Awareness

### What Causes Worker Fatigue?

Several factors including too little, poor quality or interrupted sleep over a period of time can cause fatigue. Fatigue is the body's signal that a rest period is needed. Long work hours and extended and irregular shifts may be stressful physically, mentally and emotionally. Demanding work schedules may disrupt the body's natural cycle, leading to increased fatigue, stress and lack of concentration. Other symptoms include reduced alertness, delayed reaction time, headaches, loss of appetite and digestive issues and irritability.

### What Are the Effects of Worker Fatigue?

Worker fatigue increases the risk of illnesses and injuries. Fatigue can cause weariness, sleepiness, irritability, reduced alertness, impaired decision making, lack of motivation, concentration and memory. Decreased alertness from worker fatigue has been a contributing factor in:

- Industrial disasters, such as the 2005 Texas City BP oil refinery explosion, the 2009 Colgan Air Crash, the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger and the nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island.
- Increased sleep problems and risk for injury among full-time employees in relation to the number of hours worked per week.
- Direct or indirect links to increased costs from lost productivity, increased injury and illness costs, increased time off the job due to illness and increased workers' compensation costs.

### What Can Workers Do?

Workers can promote restful, healthy sleep by following sleep hygiene recommendations. Here are some suggestions:

- Make sure that your sleep period is seven to nine hours daily without disruptions.
- Try to sleep at the same time every day.
- Avoid drinks with caffeine prior to bedtime to improve sleep quality.
- If working evenings or nights, ensure sleep has occurred within the last eight hours before going to work.
- If napping before work, make sure that the duration is less than 45 minutes or greater than two hours to allow for a complete sleep/wake cycle.
- Make sure that the sleeping environment is comfortable, cool, dark and quiet.
- Exercise regularly. Eat a balanced diet. Maintain a healthy weight.
- If you have difficulty sleeping, keep a sleep diary and talk to your doctor.
- Monitor for signs and symptoms of fatigue and take time off when you need to.
- Use micro-breaks to change positions, move about and shift concentration.

