

FIGHTING FATIGUE IN THE WORKPLACE

COURSE OUTLINE

- **We're not at our best when we're tired.**
 - Tired people make mistakes, sometimes big ones.
- **Fatigue can be a problem in all types of situations, whether you're:**
 - Operating a forklift.
 - Using a grinder.
 - Driving a truck.
 - Doing any other job that requires you to be focused and alert.
- **Feeling "exhausted" interferes with our ability to think and act effectively. It can:**
 - Prevent us from performing up to our potential.
 - Reduce our productivity
 - Significantly increase our chances of being hurt, even killed on the job.
- **It can be expensive as well. Altogether the problem of worker fatigue costs U.S. businesses more than \$130 billion per year.**
 - But fatigue can be prevented.
- **We're all familiar with fatigue. It's that feeling of physical and mental exhaustion that we have when we're...**
 - Under a lot of stress.
 - Not getting enough sleep.
 - Working extra hard.
 - Or a combination of these factors.
- **The symptoms of fatigue can vary from person to person, but they all mean the same thing.**
 - They are your body's way of telling you that it needs time to rest and recover.
- **There are a number of things that can cause us to feel fatigued.**

- **Studies show that most people need from 7 to 9 hours of sleep a day.**
 - We can feel fatigued when we don't get enough sleep, or the sleep that we do get is interrupted or of low quality.
 - Home or lifestyle changes can cause problems by affecting our sleep patterns or increasing stress, which can make it difficult to sleep.
 - "Sleep disorders" such as insomnia and sleep apnea can also interfere with our ability to sleep.
 - All of these can make us feel as if we're "running on empty".
- **In a workplace, there are certain types of tasks that can often cause fatigue.**
 - As you'd expect, these jobs tend to be mentally or physically demanding, boring or involve a lot of repetition.
- **The "normal" eight-hours-a-day, five-days-a-week daytime work schedule is designed to give employees ample time for rest and recovery.**
 - For many of us, however, that eight-hour day is anything but normal.
 - Extended shifts can cause fatigue by requiring us to work more hours per day than our body can tolerate.
- **Irregular and "on-call" shifts can be stressful because their hours often change from day to day, making it hard to establish a normal sleep cycle.**
- **Night shifts require us to be on the job when we would usually be sleeping.**
 - Night-shift employees can also often become fatigued because the sleep they are able to get during the day is usually shorter and of lower quality than normal.
- **In one way, fatigue can be helpful.**
 - It lets us know when we're "running out of gas" and we need to get some rest so we can bounce back.
- **If we don't get that rest, we start carrying a "burden of fatigue" that increases our risk of making mistakes, which can lead to accidents and injuries.**
 - This makes fatigue especially hazardous while we're working.
 - Missing an hour and a half of sleep can reduce alertness by one-third, which can make it harder for us to recognize and avoid hazards.

- **Fatigue also slows reaction times.**
 - A worker who is exhausted can take about 30% longer to respond to a hazard than one who is fully rested.
 - That extra 30% can mean the difference between a "near miss" and an accident, or even between life and death.
- **Working evening and night shifts when our body thinks we should be sleeping can also have an effect.**
- **Compared to day shifts, accident and injury rates increase:**
 - Almost 20% during evening shifts.
 - 30% during night shifts.
- **The drowsiness that is often associated with fatigue can be hazardous as well.**
 - Dozing briefly while working with hazardous chemicals, operating equipment, or driving a vehicle can have tragic consequences.
- **Fatigue can also cause us to become more irritable and less motivated.**
- **It can result in headaches, an upset stomach and digestive problems as well.**
 - Over the long term, fatigue may even lead to heart disease and some types of cancer.
- **Employers know that being fatigued while they're at work is bad for their employees, and for the company.**
 - It can drive down productivity and decrease employees' satisfaction with their jobs, while increasing absenteeism and turnover, all of which increases expenses.
- **So management has a strong motivation to try to reduce employee fatigue.**
 - One way to do this is to build systems into the workplace that help keep everyone alert and engaged.
- **These "engineering controls" can include things like:**
 - Installing better lighting.
 - Maintaining comfortable temperatures.
 - Keeping noise to reasonable levels.

- **Another approach to reducing fatigue is through scheduling and other administrative practices.**
 - Instead of extending a work shift and adding more hours to the workday, employees can be scheduled to work more days at regular hours.
 - This allows adequate time between shifts for people to "rest and recover".
- **Employers can also avoid having employees put in extended hours of heavy physical or mental exertion by spreading the work over more days or reassigning people to temporarily help out.**
 - Shifts can also be designed to allow employees to vary the tasks that they perform, reducing fatigue that occurs when their work is boring or repetitive in nature.
- **Scheduling frequent "micro-breaks" is another technique that can combat fatigue. It enables workers to "refresh" themselves by:**
 - Stretching.
 - Changing positions.
 - Changing their focus for a little while.
- **Training also plays an important role in preventing fatigue.**
 - Information can be provided to everyone on how to avoid the hazards of fatigue.
 - Managers and supervisors can learn to recognize its symptoms, so they can take appropriate action if someone shows signs of fatigue.
- **When you have a demanding work schedule, it can be tough to get the 7 to 9 hours of sleep every day that you need to stay sharp on the job.**
 - Even if you have to grab your shuteye while the sun is shining, there are some good habits that can help you get the best quality of sleep possible.
- **Good "sleep hygiene" begins with following a regular routine before bedtime, to quiet down your mind and body, and prepare yourself to sleep.**
 - It can include taking a relaxing bath or shower, reading, or listening to some soothing music for a while.
- **Next, make sure the room where you'll be sleeping is as dark and quiet as possible.**
 - Use blinds, curtains or a sleep mask to keep out the light.
 - Mute your phone and answering machine.
 - You can even wear earplugs.

- **Keeping the room cool can also help you sleep, so run an air conditioner or fan in hot weather.**
 - Not only will it reduce the heat, but the sound of the equipment can cover up noises from the outside and help you to relax!
- **Going to bed right after a heavy meal or on an empty stomach can make it harder to get to sleep.**
 - Avoid eating large meals less than two hours before you plan to hit the hay.
 - If you're hungry at bedtime, have a small, low-fat, easily-digestible snack such as fresh fruit, yogurt, oatmeal or a piece of toast.
- **Drinking alcohol or caffeinated beverages can interfere with your sleeping too.**
 - Remember, any liquids you take "on board" before you go to sleep may wake you up later when you have to "offload" them.
- **Nicotine can disturb your sleep as well.**
 - So avoid smoking before bedtime.
 - Consider quitting altogether.
- **The healthier you are, the better you can fight off fatigue.**
 - A healthy lifestyle helps you to generate the energy and alertness you need to stay "on the ball" throughout your workday.
 - In addition to getting enough sleep, you need to both eat right and get enough exercise.
- **Pay attention to what you eat, and when you eat it.**
- **Your body needs a steady supply of fuel, so eat at least three meals a day, and eat them at regular times.**
 - Stick to normal "day shift" meal times and types of food as much as possible.
 - If you're on a night shift you could eat a "lunch" when you wake up, a "dinner" before you head to work, and a "breakfast" as soon as you return home.
- **For top performance, choose foods that will give you the most energy, such as:**
 - Proteins from lean meats like skinless chicken and fish.
 - Complex carbohydrates from pastas, rice, fruits, vegetables and whole-grain breads.

- **Avoid fatty red meats, pastries, salty snack foods, whole milk dairy products and candy.**
 - They may taste good, but can rob you of energy and negatively affect your overall health as well.
- **Having a snack can help you stay "energized" during your workday, but many vending machines only sell high-fat, high-sugar and high-salt snacks, which you should stay away from.**
- **If the machines where you work offer healthier selections, like fruit, low-fat cheese, yogurt or trail mix, then enjoy!**
 - Otherwise, consider bringing healthy snacks of your own, such as nuts mixed with plain yogurt, baby carrots with low-fat cream cheese dip or an apple.
- **Regular exercise is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle.**
- **Choose any activity you enjoy, such as walking, running, light aerobics or cycling.**
 - Use it to raise your heart rate for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, at least several days a week.
 - You'll be surprised how good it can make you feel!
- **Your doctor can help, by suggesting an exercise plan that they feel will work well for you.**

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- **Fatigue is a feeling of sleepiness or exhaustion that can result from:**
 - Too little sleep.
 - Extended physical or mental work.
 - Stress and anxiety.
- **Fatigue can interfere with your ability to think and act effectively, and significantly increases the risk of incidents and injuries.**
- **Employers can help reduce worker fatigue in their facilities through a combination of engineering and administrative controls.**
- **Good "sleep hygiene" can improve both the quantity and quality of sleep.**
- **You can also fight fatigue by maintaining a healthy diet and getting plenty of exercise.**
- **Now that you understand what causes fatigue, and what you can do to fight it, you can work to ensure that you are alert... and safe... morning, noon and night!**