

FATIGUE IN THE WORKPLACE



Kia Ora everyone!

Fatigue is a common but often misunderstood issue in the workplace. It can significantly impact productivity, safety, and overall well-being. In this newsletter, we'll explore the difference between fatigue and sleepiness, the impact of sleep deprivation and its effects on work performance, how to recognize fatigue in colleagues, and strategies for managing fatigue at work, let's go!

Fatigue vs. Sleepiness: What's the Difference?

While fatigue and sleepiness are often used interchangeably, they are distinct conditions that can affect your daily life and work performance differently.

Sleepiness is the natural, physiological urge to sleep, typically caused by the lack of sleep the night before. Fatigue, on the other hand, encompasses a broader range of physical, mental, or social impairments, including tiredness, sleepiness, reduced energy, and the increased effort required to maintain a desired level of performance. WorkSafe presents four main causes of Fatigue: "missing out on sleep, being awake for too long, working and sleeping in the wrong parts of the circadian body clock cycle, and workload (physical and mental)".

In New Zealand, 37% of the population reports getting less than 7 hours of sleep per night, with Māori and Pacific population being more affected. Additionally, just over half of Kiwis say they never wake up feeling well rested.

Understanding these distinctions and risk factors can help in managing and mitigating the impacts of fatigue.



Fatigue often results from a combination of interrelated factors that can accumulate over time. Examples of the primary contributors to and risk factors for fatigue include: sleep quality and quantity, job schedules (such as shift work, long hours, and breaks), job demands (whether physical or mental, or high-pressure situations), the work environment (including physical conditions and workplace culture), and other factors like family responsibilities, health, finances, and commuting.



Sleep Deprivation and Fatigue: The Silent Productivity Killers

According to, Alison Van Wyk, Executive General Manager ProPharma NZ, **sleep apnoea** is one of the most common sleep conditions facing New Zealanders and is contributing to a **national epidemic of poor sleep health**. “There are over half a million New Zealanders who suffer from sleep apnoea, a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts. This makes it hard to get normal, healthy sleep and can potentially lead to Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, depression, and strokes.”

Despite being widespread in New Zealand, 80% of **individuals with sleep apnoea remain undiagnosed** due to the long waitlists for getting tested through our healthcare system. Typically, patients need to undergo an overnight test at a sleep laboratory to receive a diagnosis, where their vital signs are monitored and analysed while they sleep.

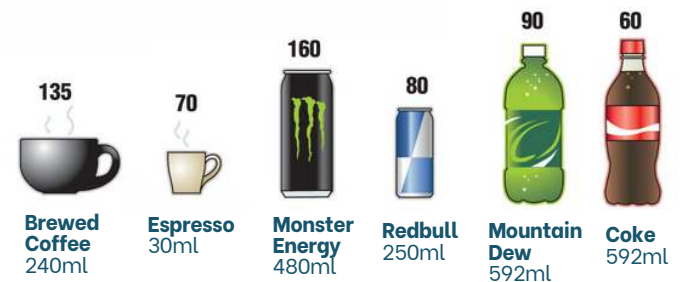
Karyn O’Keeffe from Massey University’s Sleep/Wake Research Centre stated that **insomnia and obstructive sleep apnoea**, which leads to severe snoring, are the two **most prevalent sleep disorders** affecting people.

Research by the World Association of Sleep Medicine indicates that **sleep disorders cost New Zealand at least 40 million dollars annually in lost productivity**, while also raising the risk of accidents and various other health issues.

The Impact of Caffeine on Quality Sleep

Caffeine can be a double-edged sword. While it can temporarily boost alertness, excessive or poorly timed consumption can disrupt your sleep cycle. For some people, caffeine might even cause anxiety and panic attacks, so it is important to be aware of one’s sensitivity to caffeine. To maximize its benefits, try to limit caffeine intake from sources like coffee, energy drinks, teas, and sodas to the morning hours, and avoid consuming it within 8 to 12 hours before bedtime.

Caffeine content, in milligrams per serving or container:



Researches suggest that **up to 400mg per day** is acceptable for most adults, but it does depend on body size, caffeine sensitivity and metabolism.

People at higher risk of fatigue and fatigue-related incidents include:

- Shift workers, especially those on night shifts, rotating shifts, long hours, or early morning shifts
- Fly-in, fly-out workers
- Workers engaged in prolonged or repetitive tasks
- Individuals sleeping fewer than seven hours per night
- People with untreated sleep disorders like obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and insomnia.
- Parents and caregivers of young children
- Individuals on medications that disrupt sleep



In addition to focusing on individuals, **it’s crucial to identify safety-critical activities in your workplace** where mistakes or errors in judgment could lead to serious injuries. Some examples include:

- Driving a road vehicle
- Operating a crane or other heavy machinery
- Working at heights
- Handling flammable, chemical, or explosive substances
- Engaging in other hazardous work, such as electrical work, etc.

If you're concerned about your staff's symptoms, consider reaching out to us for a fatigue assessment and support. Life Care fatigue monitoring provides you with the ability to monitor the presence of fatigue and sleepiness in the workforce. The data in our online reporting platform provides tangible results from which fatigue management decisions can be made in alignment with your business's risk mitigation plan and health and wellbeing programme.

The Impact of Fatigue on Work Performance

Fatigue can significantly impair various aspects of job performance, such as concentration, decision-making, problem-solving, coordination, and risk of accidents. Its impact varies across different industries but consistently poses a risk to productivity, quality of work, and overall workplace safety. Here's how fatigue can affect job performance in various industries:

Construction:

- Workers may struggle to focus on detailed tasks, leading to errors in measurements or misinterpretations of plans. This can result in structural flaws or unsafe building practices.
- Reduced physical performance can lead to slower completion of tasks and increased risk of injury from mishandling tools or materials.

Manufacturing:

- Fatigue can cause lapses in concentration, leading to mistakes in operating machinery, which can result in defective products or equipment damage.
- Fatigue affects hand-eye coordination, which is critical in operating precision machinery and ensuring product quality.

Retail:

- Fatigued employees might have difficulty keeping track of inventory or managing cash registers accurately, leading to stock discrepancies or financial errors.
- Workers may become physically sluggish, impacting their ability to restock shelves quickly or manage physical tasks such as unloading deliveries.

Corporate:

- Office workers may find it hard to concentrate during meetings, leading to missed details or errors in reports and communications.
- Employees may experience slower cognitive processing, affecting their ability to develop strategies or solve complex problems.

Recognising Fatigue in the Workplace: Tips on how to spot signs of fatigue in oneself and others.

Recognising fatigue early can prevent many issues. Look out for physical signs as well as behavioural changes. If you notice a drop in the quality of work or missed deadlines, fatigue might be the cause.

Physical Signs

- Frequent yawning
- Drooping eyelids
- Headaches
- Digestive issues

Behavioural Signs

- Irritability
- Reduced interaction
- Pessimistic
- Unplanned absence

Performance Signs

- Missing deadlines
- Decreased quality of work
- Short-term memory loss



Strategies for Managing Fatigue at Work How can a workplace address fatigue?

When planning for fatigue monitoring you need to consider:

- Is fatigue on your risk register?
- Are you measuring fatigue levels in your people?
- Do you have a fatigue policy?
- Do you have a response plan to address the results?
- Does your business understand what fatigue is and the difference between fatigue and sleepiness?



Fatigue is challenging to measure or quantify, making it difficult to determine its impact on incident and injury rates. However, it can be managed through a workplace's safety management system or a dedicated fatigue management program.

The most effective way to manage it is to eliminate the root causes. If elimination isn't reasonably practicable, the risks must be minimised. A comprehensive program addressing both workplace and personal factors may include:

1. Identifying hazards and conducting risk assessments for factors associated with fatigue
2. Developing and implementing the organisation's response to employees experiencing fatigue
3. Documenting the steps for reporting fatigue in oneself or others
4. Designing the work area with appropriate lighting, temperature, and noise levels
5. Establishing administrative practices, such as setting maximum hours of service, appropriate shift rotations, extended workdays, and limiting high-risk activities during certain hours (e.g., midnight to 6 am)
6. Maintaining consistent work schedules whenever possible
7. Assessing physical and mental job demands
8. Offering a variety of tasks to maintain interest and movement throughout the shift
9. Avoiding scheduling critical or demanding tasks immediately after a time change or following travel (to prevent jet lag)
10. Providing lodging or areas for rest and sleep when necessary
11. Educating and training employees about fatigue, including recognising its signs and symptoms, gauging alertness, and improving sleep quality
12. Offering medical screening for health issues that may affect sleep
13. Providing mental health services, including employee assistance programs (EAP), as needed
14. Considering fatigue as a possible factor and investigating related causes in the event of an incident

These suggestions only mitigate fatigue. To know their effectiveness and understand the level of fatigue in your workplace, screening and monitoring are essential. Our fatigue monitoring provides visibility into the risks, distinguishing between sleepiness and fatigue. This information helps you implement tailored well-being and education programmes based on the results, roles, and workplace needs.

Read the case study of Dynes Transport about Fatigue Management.

[CLICK HERE](#)





Managing fatigue at work is essential for maintaining high performance and well-being. Simple changes like taking regular breaks, staying hydrated, and incorporating short walks can make a big difference. Flexible work schedules and mental health resources can also help employees manage their energy levels more effectively.

The WorkSafe website contains numerous resources including videos on how to recognise and manage fatigue with a special focus on shift workers. For more information [click here](#).

Life Care has developed a **Health and Wellbeing Workshop** consisting of a 6-session programme designed to provide valuable insights into improving overall health. The workshop covers **key topics** such as **nutrition, exercise, and general health, with a specific session focused on fatigue and quality sleep**. Participants will gain practical knowledge and simple actions they can apply in their daily lives to enhance their well-being.

To learn more about the program's impact, watch the testimonials of workers who have experienced it.



Conclusion

Understanding and managing fatigue is key to a healthier, more productive workplace. By recognising the signs and implementing effective strategies, you can create a supportive environment that promotes well-being and performance. If you need further assistance, contact us today to learn more about our Fatigue Assessment Programme and our Health and Wellbeing workshop. **Talk with your sales manager today.**

Sources:

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[Andrew Huberman Podcast: Balancing Caffeine, Decision Fatigue & Social Isolation](#)