

BENEFITS INSIGHTS

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The Cost of Fatigue in the Workplace

Your business depends on the productivity of your employees, and one way to maximize your employees' potential is to acknowledge and address problems that cause decreased productivity. You may not realize it, but fatigue in the workplace is a serious issue in America today—one that is costing employers big in lost productivity.

The Facts

According to a study published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 38 percent of American workers surveyed experienced “low levels of energy, poor sleep or a feeling of fatigue” during their past two weeks at work. Workers who are fatigued in the workplace are less productive, less focused, experience more health problems and are more likely to be involved in a job-related safety incident. In addition, fatigue causes more absences from work, both from the tiredness itself and also from accompanying medical problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25 percent of Americans report not getting enough sleep, and 10 percent suffer from chronic insomnia. Many people beyond those with a medical condition regularly struggle with lack of sleep, trouble sleeping and/or fatigue. The study estimated that lost productivity due to fatigue is costing American businesses about \$136 million annually.

The Effects of Fatigue

Obvious signs of fatigue in an individual include drowsiness, moodiness, loss of energy, loss of appetite, and a lack of motivation, concentration and alertness. Often, men tend to become angry when experiencing fatigue, whereas women may be more sad and moody. In addition, fatigue can cause or be a result of other medical conditions, such as depression, anxiety, high blood pressure and diabetes.

What Can You Do?

Any problem that causes decreased productivity and increased absenteeism is one that you want to address in your workforce. There are several ways that you can tackle the issue of fatigue within your company:

- **Educate employees.** Many people who struggle with getting adequate or quality sleep could improve their situation by making a few habit and lifestyle

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changes. Offer them information about the importance of getting enough sleep each night, the safety concerns of coming to work tired and tips for getting better sleep. Also remind employees that a healthy diet and regular exercise can contribute to better quality sleep.

- **Include fatigue in your wellness program.** Include questions about sleep and tiredness on your health risk appraisals, and incorporate fatigue management into your wellness initiatives. Once you identify how many employees experience fatigue and/or have sleep disorders, you can offer further education, programs or referral services to address the specific problems among your employees.
- **Change company culture.** Ask employees when they are most tired during the day, and consider offering extra break time to alleviate those fatigued times. This is particularly important for workers in safety-sensitive or decision-making positions. Try to make your workplace more amenable to alertness, with proper lighting, quiet break areas for employees to rest or re-charge, adequate break time and healthy food options.

