

Sleep Deprivation Can be a Nightmare*



Are you tempted to use your computer keyboard as a pillow on many afternoons while at work? Does sleep elude you on most nights? Do you wake-up in the morning feeling exhausted? Sleep is an important part of our daily lifestyle and we do not think about it unless we are one of the 70 million Americans who suffer from sleep deprivation and other sleep disorders.¹ For the employer, the annual cost associated with chronic sleep loss is considerable; \$16 billion in health care expenses and \$50 billion in lost productivity.² The significance of sleep issues has an enormous impact on our society, including the workplace. Studies have shown that chronic insomnia strongly correlates with impaired work performance and missed work days.³

Sleep is vitally important to our emotional wellbeing as well as our physical health. Most adults require seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Medical conditions frequently associated with insomnia (comorbid insomnia) are mental health disorders (specifically, depression and substance abuse), heart disease, stroke, type-two diabetes, obesity; and musculoskeletal conditions. Other sleep disturbances that contribute to insomnia are [obstructive sleep apnea](#) and [restless leg syndrome](#).

Insomnia can lead to fatigue which can ultimately result in workplace incidents and accidents. So why not use the workplace as a forum to bring awareness about the importance of sleep. Sponsor a workplace health fair and provide [educational materials](#) where employees can learn about sleep issues. As shift work can play havoc on workers' sleep patterns, offer rotating shifts when possible and make sure all locations have bright lighting and good ventilation. The [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#) offers guidance on shift work, tap into their offerings. The workplace may contribute to fatigue if a job is physically demanding, has poor lighting, or if workstations are not ergonomically friendly. Ergonomic redesign can reduce fatigue. The [Occupational Safety & Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) provides assistance to businesses, particularly small businesses, and helps them proactively address ergonomic issues in the workplace.

The vitality of the workforce correlates with a strong bottom line. Alert employees have fewer accidents and are more productive. Employers can protect their most valuable asset by educating their employees about ways to protect their health. It's a win-win for both the employer and employee.

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Resources to Share with your Workforce

[National Sleep Awareness Week® \(NSAW\)](#), which takes place March 3-9, 2008, is a public education, information, and awareness campaign that coincides with the return of Daylight Saving Time, the annual "springing forward" of clocks that can cause Americans to lose an hour of sleep.

In Brief: Your Guide to Healthy Sleep.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthysleepfs.pdf>

A Parent's Guide to Safe Sleep

<http://www.healthychildcare.org/pdf/SIDSparentsafesleep.pdf>

Sleep Deprivation: Causes and Consequences

<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000701-d000800/d000705/d000705.pdf>

References

*The Council for Disability Awareness (CDA) would like to thank The Hartford's Center for Ability for providing the content.

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. National Institute of Health. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. National Center on Sleep Disorders Research. 2003 National Sleep Disorders Research Plan.
2. Your Guide to Healthy Sleep. NIH Publication No. 06-5271 November 2005. p2
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/sleep/healthy_sleep.pdf
Accessed 2008 February 13.
3. NIH State-of-the-Science Conference Statement on Manifestations and Management of Chronic Insomnia in Adults. Chronic Insomnia. June 13-15, 2005.