



## Managing Workplace Fatigue During COVID-19



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It has been barely six months since the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was first identified, four months since the first U.S. cases were mentioned in the news and some 10 weeks since lockdowns were imposed to help stem the spread of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus. Life and work patterns have been upended. Many of us suddenly found ourselves having to work from home, juggling the competing demands of domestic responsibilities and online meetings.

Others whose jobs cannot be performed remotely—healthcare workers, pilots, and maintainers, to name a few—have seen their schedules change dramatically. Time needs to be allocated to precautionary procedures such as screening for illness, on-site quarantines and extra cleaning. Work sets have been extended and time off duty constrained to accommodate these new demands at the workplace.

### Addressing an "Epidemic" of Exhaustion

One common result from these recent changes is increased workplace fatigue. In order to promote good health, adults typically need 7-9 hours of sleep per night, along with opportunities to recharge with exercise and good nutrition. But the disrupted work patterns during the pandemic are encroaching on these healthy practices. Getting enough sleep can be particularly challenging when working longer shifts or more days in a row without a break.

There is no easy solution to fit everyone's needs. However, there are things that you and your organization can do to help promote good sleep. Start by recognizing that these are unusual times and making sleep a priority is especially important to help combat the additional stress you may be feeling.

Here are some additional tips to improve sleep:

- Avoid consuming caffeine during the 90 minutes before you go to sleep.
- Set your thermostat to a cool, comfortable temperature or use a fan.
- Use blackout blinds and turn off any ambient light sources to ensure a dark sleeping



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environment.

- Wear earplugs to eliminate distracting background noises.
- Turn off your smartphone or tablet device 30 minutes before you go to sleep to avoid the blue light interfering with the natural release of sleep-promoting melatonin.

## Balancing Your Sleep Equation

Sometimes you may be doing everything right but still feel tired. This may be simply due to a tough schedule. Before working a long stretch of shifts, you can try "investing" in extra sleep to better equip you to be resilient. And after you've worked a long work set, remember it may take several days of extended sleep (more than you usually get) in order to feel fully recovered.

Your flight department can also do its part to promote safety and reduce fatigue. The organization should recognize that these are stressful times and unusual circumstances, and that the risk for fatigue may be increased. Creating a culture of safety with good communication between personnel and management, implementing a non-punitive policy for reporting fatigue issues and having a clear set of procedures and risk controls in place are all important steps toward effective fatigue risk management.

Here are some additional tips for employers to help reduce workplace fatigue:

- Provide training for workers on the dangers of sleep deprivation and fatigue.
- Encourage regular breaks in quiet areas where social distancing can be maintained.
- Allow workers to take 20- to 30-minute power naps, if possible.
- Avoid scheduling workers for shifts greater than 12 hours, if possible.
- Organize alternative transportation to and from work, or book hotel accommodation near the workplace, both before and after especially long shifts to avoid tired workers having to drive.
- Allow workers time to get adequate rest between shifts and to take care of their personal responsibilities.

If you would like to develop a fatigue risk management program for your organization, Pulsar Informatics can help. As fatigue risk specialists, over the past 20 years we have supported many Fortune 500 organizations and flight departments with systems and solutions to meet their fatigue risk management needs. Our technologies are grounded in science and supported by peer-reviewed research. Contact us today to learn how our FRMP-in-a-Box package can benefit your organization.



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## Pulsar Informatics, Inc.

Pulsar Informatics is an IS-BAO I3SA certified company specializing in systems that help organizations reduce fatigue-related risk and achieve peak performance. Fleet Insight enables safety managers and schedulers to proactively evaluate fatigue across their entire operation's schedule and formulate mitigation strategies. Fatigue Meter Pro Planner is used by pilots, flight attendants, and maintenance personnel to evaluate their individual flight and duty schedule.

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