**Fatigue  
  
Fatigue** is a feeling of tiredness or exhaustion or a need to rest because of lack of energy or strength. Fatigue may result from overwork, poor sleep, worry, boredom, or lack of exercise. It is a symptom that may be caused by illness, medicine, or medical treatment such as chemotherapy. Anxiety or depression can also cause fatigue.

Both weakness and fatigue are symptoms, not diseases.  
  
**Physical fatigue** - the person's muscles cannot do things as easily as they used to. Climbing stairs or carrying laden supermarket bags may be much harder than before. Physical fatigue is also known as muscle weakness, weakness, or lack of strength. Doctors usually carry out a strength test as they go about diagnosing and trying to find out the causes of individual cases of physical fatigue.  
  
**Psychological (mental) fatigue** - concentrating on things has become harder. When symptoms are severe the patient might not want to get out of bed in the morning, or perform his/her daily activities. Mental fatigue often appears together with physical fatigue in patients, but not always. People may feel sleepy, have a decreased level of consciousness, and in some cases show signs similar to that of an intoxicated state. Mental fatigue may be life threatening, especially when the sufferer has to perform some tasks, such as driving a vehicle or operating heavy machinery. Fatigue among training doctors is a serious public health concern; both for the health of the junior doctor and patients under their responsibility.  
  
**Causes of Fatigue**  
Fatigue can be caused by several different physical and psychological factors. Here is a list of some common causes of tiredness:

## a recent illness, a current illness, pregnancy, bereavement, moving home ,divorce, work problems ,[jet lag](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/165339.php),[depression](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/8933.php), boredom, lack of sleep, some type of poisoning, a [vitamin](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/195878.php) or mineral deficiency, [anemia](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/158800.php) Workplace related causes

**Psychological causes**  
Studies suggest that psychological factors are present in at least 50 per cent of fatigue cases. These may include:

* **Depression** – this illness is characterised by severe and prolonged feelings of sadness, dejection and hopelessness. People who are depressed commonly experience chronic tiredness.
* **Anxiety and stress** – a person who is chronically anxious or stressed keeps their body in overdrive. The constant flooding of adrenaline exhausts the body, and fatigue sets in.
* **Grief** – losing a loved one causes a wide range of emotions including shock, guilt, depression, despair and loneliness.

Common workplace issues that can cause fatigue include:

* **Shift work** – the human body is designed to sleep during the night. This pattern is set by a small part of the brain known as the circadian clock. A shift worker confuses their circadian clock by working when their body is programmed to be asleep.
* **Poor workplace practices** – can add to a person’s level of fatigue. These may include long work hours, hard physical labour, irregular working hours (such as rotating shifts), stressful work environment (such as excessive noise or temperature extremes), boredom, working alone with little or no interaction with others, or fixed concentration on a repetitive task.
* **Workplace stress** – can be caused by a wide range of factors including job dissatisfaction, heavy workload, conflicts with bosses or colleagues, bullying, constant change, or threats to job security.
* **Burnout** – can be described as striving too hard in one area of life while neglecting everything else. ‘Workaholics’, for example, put all their energies into their career, which puts their family life, social life and personal interests out of balance.
* **Unemployment** – financial pressures, feelings of failure or guilt, and the emotional exhaustion of prolonged job hunting can lead to stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue.

# Effects of Fatigue: Health effects of fatigue

The effects of fatigue increase with age. People over 50 years of age tend to have lighter, fragmented sleep; which can prevent them from receiving the recuperative effects from a full night of sleep, and can make them more likely to become fatigued.

Lack of sleep has been indirectly linked with the following health effects:

* [Heart disease and high blood pressure](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/fatigue/effects/health/index.htm#heart);
* [Stomach disorders](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/fatigue/effects/health/index.htm#stomach);
* [Mental illnesses](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/fatigue/effects/health/index.htm#mental); and
* [Lower fertility](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/subjects/fatigue/effects/health/index.htm#fertility).

When the circadian rhythm is disrupted, the treatment of some medical conditions can be affected. Examples of medical conditions which may be affected include:

* Asthma;
* Depression; and
* Diabetes.

## Heart disease and high blood pressure

Circadian disruptions affect eating and sleeping habits and have been linked to the following types of cardiovascular disease:

* Coronary heart disease (blocked arteries in the heart);
* Ischaemic heart disease (blocked arteries leading to lack of oxygen to the heart muscle);
* High blood pressure; and
* Myocardial infarction (heart attack).

## Stomach disorders

The body rhythm for digestion is designed for food to be eaten during the day irrespective of whether an individual is working or resting. The most common complaints include:

* Bowel habit changes;
* Digestive complaints; and
* Increased risk of peptic (stomach) ulcers.

## Mental health

Anxiety and depression can be triggered or made worse by fatigue and irregular sleep patterns.

## Lower fertility

Fatigue and irregular sleep patterns have been associated with a number of negative effects for pregnant women and fertility rates, including:

* Increased risk of miscarriage;
* Low birth weight; and
* Higher occurrence of premature births.

**What are the effects of fatigue and their relationship to work?**

Because fatigue cannot be "measured", it is difficult to separate the effects of long working hours or lack of sleep to any changes in accident or injury rates.

However, studies report the effects of fatigue as:

* reduced decision making ability,
* reduced ability to do complex planning,
* reduced communication skills,
* reduced productivity / performance,
* reduced attention and vigilance,
* reduced ability to handle stress on the job,
* reduced reaction time - both in speed and thought,
* loss of memory or the ability to recall details,
* failure to respond to changes in surroundings or information provided,
* unable to stay awake (e.g., falling asleep while operating machinery or driving a vehicle),
* increased tendency for risk-taking,
* increased forgetfulness,
* increased errors in judgment,
* increased sick time, absenteeism, rate of turnover,
* increased medical costs, and increased accident rates.

**Elimination or Prevention from Fatigue:**  
Fatigue Medical Treatment:  
Medical treatment of fatigue depends on the treatment of its underlying cause(s). Fortunately, many causes of fatigue may be treated with medications. For example:

iron supplements for anemia, medications and machines to help sleep apnea, medications to control blood sugar, medications to regulate thyroid function, [antibiotics](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=58694) to treat infection, vitamins, and/or/recommendations for dietary changes and a sensible exercise program.

### Strategies to Manage Fatigue in the Workplace

### Controlling fatigue in the workplace requires cooperation between employers and employees. Prevention is the best form of control, but is not always possible due to the number of factors that can cause fatigue. Not all of these factors are work related.

### Good management practices can assist in identifying fatigue. Employers have a duty to provide a workplace where, so far as is practicable, employees are not exposed to hazards.

### Adopting a systematic approach to identifying, assessing and controlling hazards at work can be assisted by:

### • providing safe systems of work;

### • information, instruction, training and supervision; and

### • consultation and cooperation.

### Each workplace is unique and shouldidentify strategies addressing fatigue that are appropriate for that workplace.

### These strategies should be designed and managed in consultation with employees and safety and health representatives.

### A fatigue management system involves a number of strategies

### that may include:

### Safe Systems of work

### • Scheduling work flow

### Make sure there are adequate rest periods so employees do not experience fatigue. Ensure work schedules, workload and timelines are manageable. Being on call and taking work home on top of normal duties should be assessed to determine whether people are workingexcessive hours.

### • Rostering of employees

### Define the task, select the people best suited to meet required outputs and ensure that where possible, shifts are rotated and sufficient time off is provided between shifts to allow for adequate quality of life. This includes designing or rotating jobs and tasks where practical along with recognizing potentially stressful tasks. Ensure adequate breaks are provided in suitable facilities, if available, so that the employee is away from the workstation.

### • Presenting for work

### Ensure employees are able to work safely. Employees should be made aware that factors in their personal life can impact on their level of fatigue and their capacity to work safely. The safety of those around them can also be affected. If an employee is fatigued, they should notify their employer who will need to introduce temporary measures to manage the risk of injury until the employee has recovered.

### • Health

### An employee’s health and fitness are contributing factors to the level of fatigue. The employer might provide healthy lifestyle information to encourage and promote personal health and fitness of employees, and provide support for work related problems. It may also be beneficial to offer confidential support for emotional and family problems. (See training and education).

### • Responsibilities

### An effective fatigue management system should define and communicate responsibilities. Everyone needs to be aware of and practice his or her responsibilities.

### • Documentation and records

### Work schedules, rosters and records of hours worked should be documented and retained for a reasonable period as part of good management practice.

### • Incident management

### Fatigue should be considered as a contributory factor when investigating incidents. The results of all investigations should be recorded and assessed to identify unsafe practices and changes made to facilitate the prevention of future injury and damage.

### Safe environment

### • Workplace conditions

### Safe and suitable workplace conditions help to reduce fatigue. This includes having equipment and facilities designed to Standards that meet the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. It involves designing the workplace to ensure adequate lighting, ventilation and the correct equipment to perform tasks. Workstations should be designed so the employee’s posture doesn’t induce fatigue. Special consideration should be given to the impact of environmental factors such as extreme heat or cold, tasks requiring high degrees of concentration, monotony or highly stressful situations

### Training and Information

### • Training and education

### Employers must ensure employees have the skills and competence to perform their tasks safely. Training on the issue of fatigue to employees, should

### incorporate:

### - the meaning of fatigue; - how to identify fatigue; - how to manage fatigue;

### - the workplace’s system for managing fatigue; - the responsibilities of employees in the workplace’s system; and - general health and lifestyle issues.

### Training records should be retained.

### Information for Employees

### Lifestyle choices may result in insufficient sleep and can adversely impact on an individual’s work performance the next day. Employees can help address fatigue in the workplace by:

### 1. Planning social activities so that adequate time for sleep is scheduled;

### 2. Being aware of the signs of fatigue;

### 3. Helping to identify the problem in the workplace.

### 4. Cooperating with employers and being supportive of employees trying to control fatigue;

### 5. Seeking confidential help with emotional and family problems that may be contributing to fatigue; and

### 6. Employing simple strategies that can help a person feeling fatigued to be refreshed.