

Security Spotlight

An informational Guide for Securitas Canada Clients and Employees



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Stay Vigilant! Don't Sleepwalk Through Life!



Two a.m. and Mike was still tossing and turning, desperately trying to fall asleep. A glance at the bedside clock caused him to groan; "I've got to be at work in three hours! I have to go to sleep right now!" Alas, the sandman did not visit Mike for another hour. Thirty minutes later, his alarm went off. Groggily, Mike stumbled out of bed and weaved his way to the shower. He wearily thought, "How am I going to make it through the day?"

Sleep Deprivation

Sleep is a basic need of every human being. The average adult needs 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night, although individual needs can vary. Proper rest is essential to your physical and mental health and to your performance on the job. Yet studies have shown that America is a sleep deprived nation. The Mayo Clinic states that, "Most adults get 1 to 2 hours less sleep a night than their grandparents did." The result is a chronically tired workforce which in turn means a loss in productivity¹.

Sleep deprivation can be short or long term. It can be a short term period of time in which the individual has no sleep, or it can refer to a long-term condition in which the individual gets some sleep, but not enough of the deep, restful sleep needed to maintain optimum physical and mental functioning. The cumulative effects of not getting enough sleep can result in the following problems:

- Reduced alertness and reduced mental performance
- Difficulty with remembering
- Depression
- An increased chance of illness due to a fatigued immune system

- Increased perception of pain
- Weight gain
- Increased resistance to insulin, which can lead to diabetes

Sleep-deprived people perform hand-eye coordination tasks as badly, or worse, than people who are under the influence of alcohol. The National Sleep Foundation reports that drowsiness causes one out of every six fatal traffic accidents². As a security professional, vigilance must always be uppermost in your thoughts and actions. But the effects of sleep deprivation can severely reduce your ability to concentrate and remain alert. In order to effectively combat this problem, you must be aware of the causes.

Causes of Sleep Deprivation

The reasons for not getting proper rest are many and varied, but, according to Web MD, some of the most common are:

- Drinking caffeine in the afternoon or evening
- Smoking or eating heavy or spicy foods before bed
- Going to bed at a different time each night
- Falling asleep with the television or lights on
- Restless legs syndrome
- Sleep apnea (interruption of breathing during sleep)
- Chronic insomnia

Most of these reasons are easily corrected by a change in your personal habits, but you should seek treatment from a medical professional if you suffer from conditions such as sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, or insomnia.

Sleep Apnea Can Be Deadly!

Over one in four Canadians are at high risk for having obstructive sleep apnea, which, during sleep, causes the affected person to stop breathing for a short period. This causes the brain to briefly awaken the sleeper, often without their awareness, so that breathing can be resumed. Untreated, sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, depression, and other ailments. Check with your doctor if you exhibit any of these signs of sleep apnea:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness (hypersomnia)
- Loud snoring
- Episodes of breathing cessation during sleep
- Abrupt awakenings accompanied by shortness of breath
- Awakening with a dry mouth or sore throat
- Morning headache
- Difficulty staying asleep (insomnia)
- Attention problems

Tips to Ensure a Good Rest

(Recommended by the Mayo Clinic³)

Stick to a schedule: Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on days off, to reinforce your body's sleep wake cycle, which promotes better sleep. If you don't fall asleep within 15 minutes, get up and do something relaxing. When you are tired, go back to bed. Trying to force yourself to sleep only makes it harder to sleep.

Pay attention to what you eat and drink: Don't go to bed hungry or stuffed and limit how much you drink before bed, to avoid middle-of-the-night bathroom visits. Avoid nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol for several hours prior to bedtime.

Create a bedtime ritual: Do the same things each night to tell your body it's time to wind down; such as taking a warm bath or shower, reading a book, or listening to soothing music — preferably with the lights dimmed. Relaxing activities promote better sleep by easing the transition between wakefulness and drowsiness. Do not use TV or other electronic devices as part of your bedtime ritual, as they can interfere with your slumber.

Get comfortable: A cool, dark, quiet room is usually best for sleeping. Use room-darkening shades, earplugs, a fan, or other devices to create an environment that suits your needs. Choose a comfortable mattress and pillow.

Include physical activity in your daily routine: Regular physical activity can promote better sleep and help you to fall asleep faster. But do not exercise too close to bedtime or you might be too energized to fall asleep.

Manage stress: Start with the basics: get organized, set priorities, and delegate tasks. Take a break when you need one. Share a laugh with an old friend. Before bed, jot down what's on your mind and then set it aside for tomorrow.

How to Cope with Tiredness

Everyone has an occasional night where it is just impossible to get a good rest. Many of us will turn to caffeine to combat sleepiness, but this tactic can backfire as caffeine can take up to eight hours to wear off. This can cause a reduction in sleep time and a decrease in the quality of your sleep. A caffeine habit can lead to a vicious cycle of caffeine consumption during your waking hours and poor quality rest during your sleeping hours. Instead, try one of these natural methods of staying awake and alert, as recommended by Web MD.

Get up and move around: Movement pumps oxygen through your veins, brain, and muscles resulting in an energy boost lasting up to two hours. If your Post Orders allow it, take a refreshing walk outside or in the building where you work.

Give your eyes a break to avoid fatigue: Continuous fixation on a monitor screen can cause eyestrain and fatigue. Relax your eyes by periodically looking away for a moment or two.

Eat a healthy snack to boost energy: Sugary snacks give you a quick energy boost followed by blood sugar "lows," which produce mental fogginess and lethargy. Snacks such as these will provide better overall energy in the long run:

- Peanut butter on a whole wheat cracker or celery sticks
- Yogurt and a handful of nuts or fresh fruit
- Baby carrots with a low-fat cream cheese dip

Take a breather to feel alert: Deep breathing raises blood oxygen levels in the body, slows your heart rate, lowers blood pressure, and improves circulation, aiding mental performance and energy levels. The idea of deep-breathing exercises is to inhale to the abdomen, not the chest. Sitting up straight, try this exercise up to 10 times:

- With one hand on your belly, just below your ribs, and the other on your chest, inhale deeply through your nose and let your belly push out. Your chest should not move.
- Breathe out through pursed lips as if you were whistling. You can use the hand on your belly to help push air out.

Another technique, called stimulating breath, is used in yoga for a quick energy boost and increased alertness. Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Make your in-and-out breaths short — do about three of each cycle in a second. Then breathe normally. Do this for up to 15 seconds the first time and then add on five seconds each time after until you reach a minute.

Drink water to prevent tiredness: Dehydration can cause fatigue. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and eat foods high in water such as fruits and vegetables.

1. Source: Harvard Medical School study done in 2011; published in the SLEEP medical journal.
2. Source: National Sleep Foundation, White Paper: Consequences of Drowsy Driving
3. Mayo Clinic website, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/in-depth/sleep/art-20048379>