

SESLHD GUIDELINE COVER SHEET

NAME OF DOCUMENT	Work Health and Safety – Work Related Fatigue Prevention and Management Guideline
TYPE OF DOCUMENT	GUIDELINE
DOCUMENT NUMBER	SESLHDGL/031
DATE OF PUBLICATION	August 2018
RISK RATING	Medium
LEVEL OF EVIDENCE	National Standard 1 Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist, Risk Assessments
REVIEW DATE	August 2022
FORMER REFERENCE(S)	N/A
EXECUTIVE SPONSOR or EXECUTIVE CLINICAL SPONSOR	Joy Hiley Director Workforce Services
AUTHOR	John Parkinson WHS Consultant, Health Safety & Wellbeing
POSITION RESPONSIBLE FOR DOCUMENT	Peggy Pollock Manager, Health Safety & Wellbeing Peggy.Pollock@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au
KEY TERMS	Fatigue, fatigue management plan, safety critical tasks
SUMMARY	To instruct managers and workers on how to identify and manage fatigue in the workplace

THIS DOCUMENT IS A GUIDE FOR BEST PRACTICE
This Guideline is intellectual property of South Eastern Sydney Local Health District.
Guideline content cannot be duplicated.

Feedback about this document can be sent to SESLHD-ExecutiveServices@health.gov.au

Preventing and Managing Work Related Fatigue

Section 1	Background	3
Section 2	Principles	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Section 3	Definitions.....	4
Section 4	Responsibilities	5
	Workers are responsible for:	5
	Line Managers and Senior Managers are responsible for:.....	5
	District Managers/Service Managers are responsible for:	5
	The Chief Executive is responsible for:	5
	Other PCBUs are responsible for:	5
Section 5	Identification of fatigue risks	6
Section 6	Assessment of the causes of fatigue.....	8
Section 7	Controlling the risks.....	9
Section 8	Monitoring the controls	11
Section 9	Documentation, References, Revision and Approval History	12
	Documentation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
	References	12
	External References.....	12
	Internal References	12
	Revision and Approval History	12
Appendix A	Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist'	13
Appendix B	Fatigue Risk Control Guide'.....	14
Appendix C	Fatigue Management – a worker’s guide'	17
	What is fatigue?.....	17
	What causes fatigue?	17
	The body clock	17
	Why is fatigue a problem in the workplace?	17
	Your responsibility as a worker.....	18

Section 1 - Background

This guideline has been developed to assist with preventing and managing work related fatigue. This includes identifying areas at increased risk of work related fatigue, determining whether work related fatigue already exists in the workplace and providing strategies to reduce the likelihood of work related fatigue occurring in the workplace.

The guideline has been written to assist compliance with the requirements of:

- [Safe Work Australia: Guide for Managing the Risk of Fatigue at Work](#)
- [Ministry of Health: Fatigue – Preventing and Managing Work Related Fatigue: Guidelines for the NSW Public Health System GL2007_023](#)

Section 2 - Definitions

Body clock:

- People are designed to work in the daytime and sleep at night. The internal body clock (circadian clock) causes a regular variation in the body throughout 24 hours in different physical and mental functions (such as: the sleep/wake cycle, alertness, performance and body temperature)
- Body clock rhythms generally do not adjust to shiftwork easily.

Fatigue:

- An acute, ongoing state of tiredness that leads to mental or physical exhaustion and prevents people from functioning within normal boundaries
- It is more than feeling tired and drowsy, it is a physical condition that can occur when a person's physical or mental limits are reached.

Forward shift rotation:

- Forward rotation means the direction of shifts is day-to-evening-to-night shift. A forward (clockwise) rotation is preferred rather than a backward shift rotation (day-to-night-to-evening shift)
- Forward shift rotation is generally considered to suit people better.

Officer:

- A person who makes decisions that affect all or a substantial part of the organisation (PCBU).

Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU):

- All employer-type organisations including corporations, associations, partnerships, labour hire companies, franchisees and contractors
- SESLHD is defined as a PCBU.

Safety critical tasks:

- Tasks requiring a high level of concentration, alertness and/or coordination and where the consequences of a mistake or error in judgement could cause serious injury, for example
 - driving a road vehicle or operating a crane or other high risk plant
 - working at heights
 - administration of drugs or participating in medical or surgical procedures
 - hazardous work such as: electrical work, working with flammable or explosive substances.

Shiftwork:

- Working outside normal daylight hours (7:00am to 6:00pm) the periods in which many people work a seven-to-eight-hour shift.

Worker:

- Includes employees, apprentices, students, volunteers and independent contractors.

Section 3 - Responsibilities

Workers are responsible for:

- Complying with Work Health and Safety (WHS) and Injury Management (IM) procedures
- Taking responsibility for their own safety and health
- Contributing to the identification of safety critical tasks with their manager and assisting in assessing and developing a safe work procedure that includes fatigue controls.

Line Managers and Senior Managers are responsible for:

- Implementing and complying with Work Health and Safety (WHS) and Injury Management (IM) procedures
- Ensuring staff are aware of the local arrangements for fatigue management
- Identifying safety critical tasks being performed within their department
- In consultation with workers assessing and developing safe work procedures that include fatigue controls
- Disseminating fatigue information and training workers on how to manage fatigue
- Reviewing controls on a regular basis
- Reporting and logging fatigue-related risks in their hazard register
- Ensuring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are monitored for effectiveness, and results and actions taken for fatigue-related risks are reported to the district/service managers.

District Managers/Service Managers are responsible for:

- Assisting workers and managers to implement the fatigue management requirements
- Ensuring managers of identified high fatigue-related risk departments have been provided information to be able to recognise fatigue indicators in order to take appropriate action
- Monitoring KPIs for effectiveness and reporting the results and actions taken for fatigue-related risks to the Chief Executive/senior management.

The Chief Executive is responsible for:

- Ensuring WHS and IM guidelines and procedures are in place to achieve our WHS policy objectives

Other PCBUs are responsible for:

- Consulting with SESLHD managers and workers regarding fatigue management planning and agree to implement controls

Section 4 – Identification of fatigue risks

4.1 Overview

Fatigue is a state of mental or physical exhaustion that can affect a person's ability to function normally. Workplace fatigue can be caused by long periods of high physical and/or mental demands of the work being conducted without sufficient time to rest and recover.

Other contributing factors could be:

- Work scheduling
- Performing safety critical tasks for extended periods of time
- Specific work demands
- Extremes in the work environment such as heat, cold or noisy workplaces
- Driving for long periods or at odd hours
- Lifestyle

Where fatigue is identified as a risk factor in performing work, managers are required to assess and implement control measures in consultation with the workers. This may include developing a departmental plan as well as individual fatigue management plans.

4.2 Identification of fatigue

Fatigue is normally identified in one of four ways:

- Observation of the worker (not functioning normally at work)
- The worker reports signs of fatigue
- The worker has taken excessive leave
- Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist ([Appendix 1 – Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist](#)).

Managers and workers need to be mindful of the following signs of fatigue:

- Headaches and/or dizziness
- Wandering or disconnected thoughts, daydreaming, lack of concentration
- Blurred vision or difficulty keeping eyes open
- Constant yawning, a drowsy relaxed feeling or falling asleep at work
- Moodiness, such as irritability
- Short term memory problems
- Low motivation
- Hallucinations
- Impaired decision-making and judgment
- Slowed reflexes and responses
- Reduced immune system function
- Increased errors in performing work tasks
- Extended sleep during days off work
- Falling asleep for less than a second to a few seconds and being unaware they have done so (otherwise known as micro-sleeps)
- Drifting in and out of traffic lanes or missing gear changes and turn offs when driving.

4.3 Identification of Safety Critical Tasks

In consultation with workers, the manager is to identify the safety critical tasks being performed within the department. Safety critical tasks are defined by Safe Work Australia as tasks requiring a high level of concentration, alertness and/or coordination and where the consequences of a mistake or error in judgment could cause serious injury.

Where safety critical tasks are identified, the manager, in consultation with individual workers are to conduct the [Appendix 1 – Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist](#) to identify any fatigue related risks.

Section 5 – Assessment of the causes of fatigue

Fatigue can occur as a result of various factors that may be work-related, lifestyle-related or a combination of both. If possible, it is important to identify potential causes of fatigue in the workplace before fatigue occurs. There are a number of factors that can contribute to fatigue that should be taken in consideration as they may indicate areas where action should be taken to reduce risks. Many of these hazards can be interrelated and in some cases cumulative.

5.1 Mental and physical demands of work

The work requires concentrating for extended periods of time, performing repetitious, uninteresting work and/or performing continued physical effort. These tasks can produce mental and/or physical tiredness thus increasing the risk of fatigue. Workers can be both mentally and physically fatigued at the same time.

5.2 Work scheduling and planning

Scheduling work in a way that fails to allow workers enough time to physically recover and socialise can cause fatigue. The time of day (or night) work is performed and the number of hours worked in a shift can impact on their work and increase the risk of fatigue. Working at times when workers are biologically programmed to sleep and working for long periods of time can contribute to fatigue.

5.3 Environmental conditions

Working in harsh and/or uncomfortable conditions can contribute to fatigue, for example, working in extremely hot or cold work environments. For managing noisy workplaces see [SESLHDPR/394 Work Health and Safety – Noise Management Procedure](#).

5.4 Other workplace hazards

It is also important to consider whether a person is subjected to other workplace hazards, such as hazardous manual tasks, or exposure to hazardous chemicals. For other specific risk information the following procedures may assist:

- [SESLHDPR/315 Work Health and Safety – Hazardous Manual Task Risk Management Procedure](#)
- [SESLHDPR/208 Work Health and Safety – Hazardous Chemical Management Procedure](#)

5.5 Organisational factors

Due to the nature of our work as an essential on-demand service operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, there may be factors outside of the organisation's control that may impact on worker fatigue.

5.6 Individual and lifestyle factors

Factors that cause fatigue due to sleep deprivation include:

- Travel requirements
- Family responsibilities
- Health conditions
- Secondary employment commitments

When fatigue related risks are identified, a [Generic Risk Assessment](#) is to be conducted.

Section 6 – Controlling the risks

Managers have an obligation under the *NSW Work Health Safety Act 2011* to utilise known controls in managing risks. There are a number of known control measures outlined in the Fatigue Risk Control Guide ([Appendix 2 – Fatigue Risk Control Guide](#)) that should be considered in consultation with the persons carrying out the work, taking into account the nature of the work and the characteristics of the service.

6.1 Departmental fatigue management plan

Where the fatigue identification and assessment process indicates that the fatigue risks are generic for all workers in the department due to the nature and circumstances of the work, the manager must develop a departmental fatigue management plan. Using the Fatigue Risk Control Guide ([Appendix 2 – Fatigue Risk Control Guide](#)), the manager should develop, in consultation with the workers, appropriate strategies to minimise fatigue. These controls should address the scheduling and allocation of tasks and the work environment. Examples may be:

- Reviewing the scope to rotate the tasks
- Reviewing the scope to rotate workers through different positions within the department
- Considering the provision of direct supervision or working in pairs
- Reviewing the lighting within the work area.

The fatigue management plan for the department can be documented via the [F038 Generic Risk Assessment](#) form, or incorporated into the everyday business processes or business plan of the department.

The manager is to provide general information to all workers with regard to fatigue related risks and through discussion at team meetings and making Fatigue Management – a worker's guide ([Appendix 3 – Fatigue Management – A Worker's Guide](#)) available to workers.

The level of direct supervision or pairing of workers needs to be considered based on the level of risk. For example, a higher level of supervision may be required for safety critical tasks, which may include:

- Monitoring work to ensure safe work practices are followed
- Ensuring workers new to the job or unfamiliar with the work environment are adequately supervised
- Where appropriate and practicable, ensuring workers do not work alone; and
- Where working alone or offsite cannot be avoided, ensuring a process is in place for workers to comply with the existing procedures:
 - [SESLHDPR/230 Work Health Safety - Risk Management for Staff Working Off Site Procedure](#)
 - [SESLHDPR/323 Work Health Safety - Working Onsite Alone or in Isolation Procedure](#)

6.2 Responding to an individual worker's experience of fatigue

Where a worker experiences fatigue, the following is to occur:

- The worker should report fatigue signs and symptoms as soon as practicable to their manager or a senior manager
- The worker should be encouraged by other workers and/or directed by their manager to stop performing the tasks as soon as practicable
- The manager will consult with the worker about what options are available to ensure they are fit to continue working and what short term controls will be put in place to assist with managing the fatigue. See the Fatigue Risk Control Guide ([Appendix 2 – Fatigue Risk Control Guide](#))
- In some circumstances the best control strategy may be for the worker to take leave for the rest of their scheduled shift
- Where a worker is finishing their shift early due to fatigue, the manager or senior manager may need to make special arrangements to ensure the worker returns home safely.

7.3 Individual fatigue management plan

Where fatigue risks are identified as specific to a particular worker or role within a department, an individual fatigue management plan may be necessary. The manager must conduct a risk assessment with the worker to identify the task and personal factors contributing to fatigue (for example, the worker is required to travel long distances as part of their role, or has health related issues) and develop agreed controls. These are to be documented using the [F038 Generic Risk Assessment](#) form and reviewed regularly.

The manager is to provide the worker with a copy of Fatigue Management – a worker's guide ([Appendix 3 – Fatigue Management – A Worker's Guide](#)). The manager and worker will discuss the aspects of the information to identify any changes the worker may need to make and document these as part of their individual plan. This is also an opportunity for the manager to discuss other related policies and procedures such as:

- [PD2016_045 Employee Assistance Programs](#)
- [PD2017_028 Leave Matters for the NSW Health Service](#)
- [New South Wales Premier's Department - Flexible Work Practices](#)
- [SESLHDPR/435 Flexible work practices](#)

Section 7 - Monitoring the controls

7.1 Monitor and reviewing control measures

Three months after implementation, the manager in consultation with the worker/s, must review the effectiveness of the control measures in preventing and managing fatigue.

The fatigue management plan is then to be reviewed at least annually or if changes occur in the workplace, whichever occurs first. It is suggested that an individual fatigue management plan is evaluated as part of the workers annual performance review.

7.2 Audit

Compliance with this procedure will be audited through the OHS & IM Profile every two years in accordance with the KPIs:

- Percentage of departments assessed for Safety Critical Tasks.
- Percentage of individual assessments completed.
- Percentage of individual assessments reviewed.

Section 8 – References, Revision and Approval History

References

External References

- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011 No 10](#)
- [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011](#)
- [Guide for Managing the Risk of Fatigue at Work - Safe Work Australia 2013](#)
- [NSW Ministry of Health 'Fatigue - Preventing & Managing Work Related Fatigue: Guidelines for the NSW Public Health System' GL2007_023](#)

Internal References

- [SESLHDPR/271 Work Health Safety - Statement of Commitment Procedure and Poster](#)
- [WHS Definitions Dictionary](#)
- [F126 WHS Record keeping matrix](#)

Revision and Approval History

Date	Revision no:	Author and approval
Nov 2013	0	Developed by Ron Taylor, WHS Consultant in line with WHS Act, Regulations and Code of Practice.
Nov 2013	1	Re-formatted by Scarlett Acevedo, District Policy Officer.
Mar 2014	1	Finalised by Author and approved by Executive Sponsor for submission to DET.
August 2018	2	Desktop Revision and Links Update - John Parkinson, WHS Consultant Endorsed by Executive Sponsor

Appendix 1: Fatigue Hazard Identification Checklist

1. This checklist is to be completed where safety critical tasks have been identified.
2. The manager is to complete the checklist in consultation with the individual worker.
3. If the answer is yes to any shaded questions, or yes to three or more of the questions in the non-shaded areas, the manager must assess the fatigue risks and implement control measures.

Mental and physical work demands	
Is physically demanding work undertaken for long periods? (For example, tasks that are especially tiring and/or repetitive such as manual patient transfers, mopping, vacuuming, typing, process work, moving heavy bags or items)	Yes/No
Is mentally demanding work undertaken for long periods? (For example, work that requires vigilance, work that requires continuous concentration and minimal stimulation, work performed under pressure, work to tight deadlines, emergency call outs, interacting/dealing with the public)	Yes/No
Work scheduling and planning	
Does the worker perform work or travel between midnight and 6am?	Yes/No
Does the worker perform work at low body clock times (between 2 am and 6 am)?	Yes/No
Does the work scheduled prevent the worker having at least one day off per week?	Yes/No
Does the schedule make it difficult for the worker to consistently have at least two consecutive nights sleep per week?	Yes/No
Do work practices include on-call work, call-backs and/or sleepovers?	Yes/No
Does the schedule differ from the hours actually worked?	Yes/No
Does the work schedule include rotating shifts?	Yes/No
Is work performed regularly in excess of 12 hours? This would include any overtime worked.	Yes/No
Does the worker work on average more than 56 hours per week?	Yes/No
Does the worker have less than 10 hours between each shift? (for example, split shifts, quick shift changeovers)	Yes/No
Work environmental conditions	
Is work carried out in harsh or uncomfortable conditions? (for example, hot, humid, cold temperatures)	Yes/No
Does the worker perform work with plant or machinery that vibrates?	Yes/No
Is the worker exposed to hazardous chemicals?	Yes/No
Is the worker consistently exposed to loud noise?	Yes/No
Other conditions	
Does the worker have to travel more than one hour to get to their job?	Yes/No
Are there currently any contributing external factors that may impact on the workers ability to perform their tasks? (for example, family commitments, pre existing health conditions)	Yes/No

Appendix 2: Fatigue Risk Control Guide

Reference: [Safe Work Australia – Guide for Managing the Risk of Fatigue at Work](#)

The controls listed below are provided for reference and in consideration of the specific workplace or nature of work.

Risk factor	Control measures to consider – Where reasonably practicable
<i>Mental and physical demands of work</i>	
<p>These include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetitive or monotonous work; • sustained physical or mental effort; • sustained and/or complex physical or mental tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-design jobs to eliminate boring, repetitive tasks • Improve communication • Provide training to allow multi-skilling and effective job rotation • Use plant, machinery and equipment to eliminate or reduce the excessive physical demands of the job • Alternate tasks to reduce the amount of time employees/workers need to spend performing sustained physically and mentally demanding work • Ensure there are adequate employees/workers and other resources to do the job • Roster enough employees/workers during peak times and demands • Ensure adequate breaks during shifts to allow recovery • Eliminate sources of risks that might exacerbate fatigue (e.g. manual handling, extremes of temperature) • Improve the duration and timing of work • Ensure safe and efficient shift hand-over • Department/service contingency plans for peak service periods or emergencies where workers will have to unexpectedly work longer hours, more shifts or a long sequence of shifts.
<i>Work scheduling and planning</i>	
<p>Night shifts, including the number of consecutive night shifts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate the use of night shifts for particular jobs or activities • Schedule complex tasks for daytime • Schedule work for hours when the risks may be lower – for example, complex and safety-critical tasks are best undertaken during normal day shifts when employees/workers are less likely to be fatigued, rather than during low body clock periods • Limit the number of consecutive night shifts worked in a row • Minimise or redesign routine administrative tasks to ensure employees/workers can focus on core duties during their night work • Allow regular night-shift employees/workers periods of normal night time sleep to catch up on their sleep deficit • Ensure that rosters allow for at least two full nights' of sleep after the last night shift • Arrange shifts so that day sleep is adequate • Use a forward-rotation shift system (i.e. morning to afternoon, afternoon to night) • Improve the order, speed, direction and length of rotation of the shift cycle • Except for emergencies, give at least 24 hours notice before night work. Consider providing a longer period of notice so that employees/workers have time to adjust their activities.

Shift start/finish times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure time for adequate communication at shift handovers • Provide information to shift workers that contains tips for them to prevent and manage fatigue. An example of a factsheet is included at Appendix C.
Short breaks between work shifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the length of breaks between shifts • Allow for recovery between work periods • Defer non-urgent work to allow appropriate rest and recuperation for employees/workers • Make sure that there is enough time in a break for uninterrupted sleep.
Changes to rosters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set shift rosters ahead of time and avoid sudden changes of shifts to allow workers to plan leisure time • Reduce irregular and unpredictable work schedules • Manage workload and work-pace change caused by machinery breakdowns or planned and unplanned absences • Design rosters so there is adequate recovery time between shifts to travel, eat, wash and sleep.
Long hours because of on call duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the length of breaks between shifts • Allow for recovery between work periods • Defer non-urgent work to allow appropriate rest and recuperation for employees/workers • Provide rest days (opportunity for two consecutive night sleeps) • Make sure that there is enough time in a break for six hours uninterrupted sleep.
Short breaks between work shifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more and/or longer breaks to allow for recovery within work periods • Provide adequate resources to cover breaks • Ensure adequate number and location of toilet facilities • Where split shifts are used, arrange timing so sleep of employees/workers is not disrupted due to the times they are required to work.
Long hours of work in a single shift. This includes travel time, especially for remote sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce working hours • Increase resourcing • Eliminate the use of extended hours for particular jobs or activities • Control the length of shifts • Limit the use of overtime, especially unscheduled overtime • Monitor hours of work • Limit shifts to 12 hours including overtime. • Avoid overtime allocation after afternoon or night shifts (particularly after 10 or 12 hour night shifts).
Long hours of work across a shift cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit use of standby and on-call duties • Ensure that exchange of shifts does not result in excessive hours.

Work environment conditions	
Stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve job control and the other risk factors associated with stress • Ensure opportunities to clarify stress-related issues.
Adverse physical conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid working during periods of extreme temperature • Control exposure to hazardous substances and environments • Use effective protective clothing and equipment, allowing for different shifts • Use heating and cooling to control ambient temperatures to support alertness • Ensure the workplace and surroundings are well lit, safe and secure.
Repetitive tasks Effect of exposure during extended shifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers who perform repetitive manual tasks should have regular rest breaks • Ensure exposures are carefully monitored and exposure levels adjusted. For example, refer to Noise Procedure for Noise related risks.

Other contributing working conditions	
Leave management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put in place local processes to manage accrued leave. Refer MoH Leave Matters Manual. • Consider future rosters and schedules when approving request for leave or shift swaps, to ensure there is still a manageable workload for the work team. • Fill vacant positions as soon as reasonably practicable. • Ensure the impact of service delivery needs on workers is considered. • Ensure sufficient workers are made available to fill a roster. • Have access to on-call workers for unplanned leave, emergencies or where workload increases.
Absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure absenteeism is monitored against accrued leave balances and requests for leave. Refer MoH Leave Matters Manual.
Organisational factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage workers to report any concerns they may have about work-related fatigue. • Consider measures to deal with risks where workers drive home tired or fatigued after long working hours, night work • Consider alternative options to face-to-face meetings such as teleconferencing. • Where workers travel long hours on a project to sleep overnight to avoid driving when tired or fatigued after project completion. • Review the need for subcontractors or labour hire staff to work similar shifts and shift cycles to the permanent workforce. • Allow trial periods for new working arrangements and evaluating them.
Individual and non-work factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide suitable professional advice, e.g. an employee assistance program, sleep disorder clinic • Maintain vigilance in identifying non-work related factors • Provide information and education about how non-work related factors can increase the risks of fatigue • Provide a mechanism to encourage workers to report non-work factors that might affect fatigue management.

Appendix 3: Fatigue Management – a worker’s guide

Reference: [Safe Work Australia - Fatigue Management - A Worker’s guide](#)

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy. In a work context, fatigue is a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion that reduces a person’s ability to perform work safely and effectively.

It can occur because of prolonged or intense mental or physical activity, sleep loss and/or disruption of the internal body clock.

Signs of fatigue include:

- tiredness even after sleep
- reduced hand-eye coordination or slow reflexes
- short term memory problems and an inability to concentrate
- blurred vision or impaired visual perception
- a need for extended sleep during days off work.

What causes fatigue?

Fatigue can be caused by work related or non-work related factors or a combination of both.

Work related causes of fatigue include excessively long shifts, not enough time to recover between shifts and blocks of shifts, very strenuous jobs and long commuting times. An example of non-work related fatigue would be poor quality sleep due to street noise or family demands.

The body clock

Most people are day-orientated meaning they are most alert and productive in the daytime and sleep at night. The circadian rhythms (the body clock) cause regular variations in individual body and mental functions repeated approximately every 24 hours. These rhythms regulate sleeping patterns, body temperature, heart rate, hormone levels, digestion and many other functions.

These rhythms influence job performance and quality of sleep. Most of the body’s basic functions show maximum activity by day and minimum activity by night. The body rhythms affect the behaviour, alertness, reaction times and mental capacity of people to varying degrees.

Why is fatigue a problem in the workplace?

Fatigue may increase the risk of incidents because of a lack of alertness. Fatigue may result in a slower reaction to signals or situations and affect the ability to make good decisions, particularly when:

- operating fixed or mobile plant including driving vehicles
- undertaking critical tasks that require a high level of concentration
- undertaking night or shift work when a person would ordinarily be sleeping

A person conducting a business or undertaking must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers while they are at work. This means if fatigue is identified as causing a risk to work health and safety, then suitable control measures should be implemented in consultation with workers to eliminate or minimise the risks.

Your responsibility as a worker

Workers have a duty to take reasonable care for their own safety and health and that their acts or omissions don't adversely affect the health or safety of others. Workers must also comply with any reasonable instruction and cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure relating to fatigue at the workplace, for example fitness for work policies and policies regarding second jobs.

To reduce the risk of being involved in a work incident caused by fatigue, you should:

- comply with your organisation's policies and procedures relating to fatigue
- understand your sleep, rest and recovery needs and obtain adequate rest and sleep away from work
- seek medical advice and assistance if you have or are concerned about a health condition that affects your sleep and/or causes fatigue
- assess your own fitness for work before commencing work
- monitor your level of alertness and concentration while you are at work
- look out for signs of fatigue in the people you work with
- in consultation with your supervisor, take steps to manage fatigue, for example take a break or short nap (night shift), maintain hydration (drink water), do some stretching or physical exercise, adjust the work environment (lighting, temperature)
- talk to your supervisor or manager if you foresee or experience being impaired by fatigue likely to create a health and safety risk e.g. because of a health condition, excessive work demands or personal circumstances
- assess your fatigue levels after work and take suitable commuting and accommodation options (e.g. avoiding driving if fatigued)