

Solutions

FAMILY SERVICES EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS NEWSLETTER

Catching your ZZZs?

Are you having trouble sleeping? Do you find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning? Do you have trouble

concentrating on complex tasks? Do you fall asleep while reading or watching TV? Are you forgetful, irritable, jumpy...? You could be suffering from the beginning stages of sleep deprivation.

The causes of sleep deprivation are as varied as its symptoms and include everything from stress-related insomnia; to medical disorders such as sleep apnea (where you actually stop breathing for short periods of time during sleep), chronic fatigue syndrome, and narcolepsy (uncontrollable attacks of drowsiness or sleep). A change in your normal sleep routine—a series of late-night study sessions, a last minute holiday shopping blitz, a change in shift—can also be a contributing factor.

Studies have shown that fatigued workers are at greater risk of causing workplace accidents. The Exxon Valdez crash and the explosion at Chernobyl are just two examples of the worst that can happen when workers suffer from a lack of sleep. Drivers are also at risk. In fact, recent U.S. and U.K. studies rate driver fatigue as the second leading cause of traffic accidents, just behind substance abuse. Personal relationships are strained to the breaking point when mental fatigue affects the brain's ability to process emotions. Higher divorce rates in families where one or both partners are shift workers may be a result of emotional stress caused by sleep problems and fatigue.

GETTING TO SLEEP:

- find something that you can do before bed that will relax you—a massage, a warm bath, reading, listening to music...
- cut out caffeine and alcohol before bed
- stick to a regular bed and wake time
- leave work at the office and reserve the bedroom for more relaxing—and pleasurable—activities
- do not try to go to sleep if you are not tired, and if you find yourself tossing and turning, get out of bed and do something else until you are tired

The good news is that sleep researchers have also found that just a few hours of rest can restore both the body and the brain to peak performance, even after hours or even days of sleep deprivation.

Many experts now prescribe a short nap (no more than 30 minutes) during the day as an energizer for sleep deprived patients. And though some sleep disorders cannot be “cured,” they can be treated with a combination of drug therapy and lifestyle changes including getting plenty of rest, exercising regularly, practicing relaxation techniques, eating a balanced diet, and cutting out caffeine and alcohol. More tips for “Catching your ZZZs” are included below.

CATCHING UP ON LOST SLEEP:

- pick one day each week to sleep in an extra hour and another to turn in early
- try replacing your afternoon coffee break with a short nap
- if you have young children at home, try napping with them

If at any time your lack of sleep makes it difficult or impossible to function during waking hours, or if your sleep problems persist over three or four weeks, see your physician.

WORK PLACE

Conflict

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable. And unless your work completely isolates you from co-workers, customers, suppliers and vendors, it's likely that you have already experienced some form of conflict in your professional life. How you handled that conflict was probably a fair indication of your ability to cope with both your own stress, and the reactions of others to stressful situations.

Negative reactions to the stress involved in workplace conflict may include expressions of anger, resentment and even hostility. It is important to recognize that these reactions are part of a normal response process—the result of overall feelings of helplessness and frustration with a stressful situation and not a personal attack. It is equally important to ensure that your own response does not fuel the anger. To help you direct your responses, diffuse anger, and control conflict situations, some general guidelines for effective conflict communication are listed below. Try them during your next (and there will be a next) workplace conflict, or adapt them to use during personal conflict situations with family and friends.

- 1** Don't take it personally. Realize that the individual is angry at the situation not you personally.
- 2** Let the individual vent their anger by allowing them to speak without interruption.
- 3** Apply active listening skills including:
 - maintaining eye contact
 - asking questions and addressing them by name
 - taking notes when necessary
 - restating your understanding of the problem.

The person probably already feels that no-one is taking them seriously. Your interest will show them that you are genuinely concerned and want to help them.
- 4** Apologize and mean it. Even if you did not cause the problem personally, tell the person how sorry you are that they have had a bad experience.
- 5** Take responsibility. Do not make it appear that you are passing blame or passing them off to someone else to deal with.
- 6** Do what you can to solve the problem right away. If you don't know the answer to something, tell them you don't know but promise to find out for them.
- 7** Keep your promises. The person is probably already feeling betrayed and your doing what you say you are going to do will go a long way to regaining their trust.

If at any time you feel that the person is becoming violent and your personal safety is at risk, remove yourself from the situation and call for help from a safe location.

Family Services offers confidential professional assistance on a wide variety of personal and work-related issues. For more information on your EAP call 1-800-668-9920