Sleep Deprivation:
Checklist for Workplace Strategies

Health Advocate
Always at your side
This checklist offers effective strategies that can help employees get the sleep they need for peak performance.

The fact is, sleep deprivation among American workers is one of the most important—and costly—hazards facing businesses in every industry. Surveys show that 30 percent of workers get six or less hours of sleep a night. Yet, seven to nine hours is considered the optimum amount for peak functioning.

The causes for sleep loss and fatigue include insomnia, underlying health conditions, longer work hours and global business travel. And the consequences are severe. Sleepy workers are less productive, absent more frequently and are 70 percent more likely to have work-related accidents. And, workers with insomnia, for instance, are twice as likely to be hospitalized, take more medications and undergo more tests over a one year period.

The cost to businesses is estimated to be more than $136 billion per year in health-related lost productivity.

“It is time to make sleep management a health priority,” says Ilene Rosen, M.D., Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Department of Medicine, Division of Sleep Medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. The step-by-step strategies listed here can help workers get adequate sleep, increase productivity and lower costs.
Analyze the Problem

Assessing the scope of the problem is the first step to customizing your strategies.

**Provide a company-wide, confidential survey.** Be sure the survey is anonymous so workers will answer honestly and without fear of retribution.

Here are sample survey topics to include:

- The average hours of sleep they get each night
- How often they feel as if they could fall asleep while on the job
- If they feel their sleepiness affects their work productivity
- Whether they have been diagnosed with a sleep-related disorder, including sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome
- The number of nights a week that they have trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep
- If/how their job or work-related duties affects their ability to get a good night’s sleep

**If possible, collect data on sleep-related health problems.** Data may include hypertension and obesity—which can be a consequence among sleep-deprived workers—and will allow you to track the effectiveness of the strategies relating to these medical problems.¹

**Offer employees a Health Risk Assessment (HRA).** This confidential, online or print questionnaire can include questions about sleep habits and other contributing lifestyle factors as well as unhealthy coping habits including alcohol use that interfere with sound sleep.²

Learning their risks for health issues may encourage employees to change habits to manage conditions that could worsen by getting inadequate sleep. The HRA may also motivate employees to enroll in wellness programs that target behavior change.²

**Evaluate current productivity benchmarks.** These benchmarks include absenteeism rates, number of sick days, productivity, work-related accidents and injuries, and healthcare costs.
Set Policies

Make flexible scheduling available. On an individual or company-wide basis, establish restructured schedules that allow employees to: come in to work later or to leave earlier to meet personal and family obligations, for instance; telecommute; and/or work on a part-time schedule.

Limit scheduled shift hours. Sleep expert and Harvard Medical School Professor, Charles A. Czeisler, PhD, M.D., recommends that employees working the night shift or extended shifts should not work more than four or five days in a row.6

Discourage taking work home. Be sure that your company culture does not demand and reward long hours or require that employees bring work home.

Set safe business travel strategies. Set a policy that discourages employees to take work-related overnight flights and that provides one day or more before conducting business. To avoid the dangers of drowsy driving, make sure overnight flights are not immediately followed by driving to a business meeting. Consider providing a car service or another mode of transportation to the meeting.6

Be a role model. It is vital that top executives set an example for your employees by following the “no-work-at-home” policy and safe travel strategies.

Integrate sleep into wellness programs. Place the same emphasis on proper sleep as a healthy indicator as your company places on smoking or other unhealthy habits, suggests Dr. Czeisler.

Install an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Counselors can help address underlying issues that may interfere with adequate sleep such as stress, family or work conflict, or balancing the dual responsibilities of caregiving and job duties.

Allow short-term napping. As little as a 20-minute nap can help improve an employee’s productivity. Consider dedicated nap rooms with scheduled napping.7

Offer health coverage for sleep-related issues. This may include evaluation at a sleep center, medical treatments for sleep disorders and cognitive behavioral therapy, shown to be one of the most effective ways to treat chronic insomnia, for example.8,9
Implement Strategies

**Educate employees.** Through seminars, newsletters, flyers and the company intranet, emphasize the importance of adequate sleep as well as the effects of sleep loss on their health (e.g., weight gain and mood), their productivity and safety.

**Provide sleep hygiene tips.** The following key tips can help promote a good night’s sleep:

- Keep the bedroom as dark as possible.
- Make the bedroom an “electronic-free” zone—no cell phones, television, or computers.
- Go to sleep at the same time and wake up at the same time.
- Reduce noise; suggest the use of a white noise machine or ear plugs.
- Maintain a neat, uncluttered bedroom that provides a soothing environment.
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeinated drinks, nicotine and alcohol before bed.

**Describe symptoms of sleep disorders and signs of chronic sleepiness.** Include how to address any sleep problems with their doctor.

**Advise about other contributing medical and lifestyle causes.** Review factors such as alcohol and drug use, stress and worry, as well as side effects of certain medications. Encourage employees to seek treatment and use the company resources (e.g., EAP service; wellness program).

**Emphasize the danger of drowsy driving.** Remind them that a chronic lack of sleep can have the same impact on their driving as being legally drunk.

**Encourage scheduled short-term naps.** Remind them to limit the time to 20-30 minutes to avoid grogginess that can hinder performance.

**Educate managers about identifying sleep-deprived employees.** Inform them about the main symptoms and what actions to take.
Evaluate Progress

Review the before-and-after benchmarks. Use company records to measure the success of the sleep policies.

Compare repeated Health Risk Assessment results. This can help gauge the effectiveness of the sleep management strategies.

Maintain communications. Keep employees continually aware of the importance of proper sleep, and the company’s policies, programs and services that support efforts to prevent sleep loss.
References


5. Phone interview, Ilene M. Rosen, M.D. Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine, Department of Medicine, Division of Sleep Medicine, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine.


Sleep Deprivation: Checklist for Workplace Strategies
This is a two-part publication, providing a White Paper and a Checklist.

This “Sleep Deprivation: Checklist for Workplace Strategies” is a companion to Health Advocate’s White Paper, entitled “Sleep Deprivation: A Wake-up Call for Business.” This Checklist provides steps that employers can take to help employees get the sleep they need to perform at their best and reduce costs.

Additional White Papers
The following previously published Health Advocate White Papers are available for free on our website at: HealthAdvocate.com/webinars_seminars.aspx. There is a companion Checklist that accompanies each White Paper.

**Workplace Wellness**
More companies recognize that having unhealthy employees has become a critical burden and that wellness programs can provide an effective solution to rising healthcare costs. Instituting wellness programs that help employees adopt healthier behaviors can be an important way to decrease illness, absenteeism, turnover, medical claims, to increase productivity and create a healthier bottom line.

**Obesity in America**
Obesity, an alarmingly increasing phenomenon in the U.S., is a major factor in a host of chronic—and costly—conditions from diabetes to heart disease that are correspondingly increasing. Workplace strategies that help promote weight loss can significantly lower risk factors, injuries, absenteeism and, ultimately, healthcare costs.

**Stress in the Workplace**
Job stress is a leading source of stress for Americans, costing businesses $200-$300 billion a year in terms of lost productivity, disability, absenteeism and presenteeism, where employees are present but function below par. Workplace strategies that help employees develop resiliency are becoming a critical component of wellness programs to help lower costs.

**Caregiving**
About one in three employees care for a loved one who is elderly, sick or has special needs. The cost to businesses associated with absences, turnover, replacement, lost productivity, and stress-related illness can reach as high as $33 billion a year. Employer-based strategies that support caregiving responsibilities can reduce the negative health effects, improve productivity and save costs.

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