



feeling tired?

Drowsiness can be dangerous

Being tired at work can be just as dangerous as taking alcohol or drugs:

- you lose concentration
- you don't judge speed and distance so well
- you react more slowly
- you might even fall asleep.

Any of those could put you and other people in danger. And being tired makes some people moody and irritable, which can cause them to take risks.

Shift work

When you work different shifts, you're bound to feel tired sometimes. You're out of step with your body's natural sleep/wake rhythms. This leaflet explains how to reduce the problem.

Are you at risk

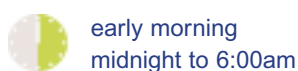
You're most likely to feel tired or drowsy at work if:

- you haven't had enough proper sleep
- you're working alone
- you're doing the same task for a long time
- you don't take proper rest breaks.

Some medicines can also cause sleepiness, such as cold tablets, anti-histamines or anti-depressants.

The worst times

There are two times of day when you're most likely to feel drowsy – in the early hours after midnight, and in the afternoon after you've had a meal.



early morning
midnight to 6:00am



mid afternoon
2:00-6:00pm

How to get a good night sleep

Most people need seven to eight hours' sleep. If you get less than six hours, you're very likely to feel drowsy at work. And the effects of lost sleep build up – losing two hours for four nights in a row makes you almost as tired as losing a whole night's sleep. In the end you need a really good, long sleep to catch up.

These are some of the things you can do to make sure you sleep well.

Get comfortable

As well as a comfortable bed, you need a dark room, not too warm (18°C or less) and with fresh air circulating.

Keep to a routine

With a regular sleep time and wake time, your body knows what to expect. If you're on rotating shift work, try changing gradually before you start a new shift – move your bedtime by an hour or two each day.

Before you go to bed

Help your body to get ready for sleep. Wind down, put the problems away until tomorrow. A little gentle exercise might help, but nothing strenuous like jogging.

It's best not to eat a big meal just before bedtime, but a light snack is okay. Don't drink anything with caffeine, like coffee or energy drinks. Alcohol is not good either because you don't sleep as deeply.

If you can't get to sleep

It's sometimes best to get up again until you feel sleepy. Find a way to relax, like taking a bath or reading a book. That's particularly important if worry or stress is keeping you awake.

When you're asleep

Set things up so your sleep won't be disturbed. Use an answering machine for the telephone. If there are children around, make sure they don't wake you. If noise keeps you awake, try using ear plugs.





If you often get drowsy at work, you need to ask why. The usual reason is simply that you're not getting enough good, deep sleep.

How to stay alert at work

As well as getting a good sleep, there are other ways to make sure you're wide awake when you need to be.

Take exercise

A little exercise after sleeping will help you to wake up and be fully alert. And regular exercise as part of your life will help you to sleep well, stay healthy and feel fit.

Eat the right foods

Proper meals will keep you going longer without getting tired. Don't rely on snack bars or other sugary foods. They give you a big rush of energy, the 'sugar high', but that's followed by a low that makes you feel tired again. A sandwich is better, preferably with brown bread.

Drink the right drinks

Drink plenty of water, especially if you're doing physical work that makes you sweat. Otherwise, you risk getting dehydrated, and that can affect your concentration. Canned soft drinks are not as good as water – like snack bars, they can lead to sugar highs and lows.

What to do if you feel drowsy

Danger signs of drowsiness include:

- you keep yawning
- your thoughts keep wandering
- you suddenly realise you haven't been concentrating
- your eyes close for a moment or go out of focus
- you have trouble keeping your head up.

If this happens, take a break if you can. Rinse your face with cold water. Have a sandwich and water, juice or a hot drink. Don't start again until you're fully alert.

If you can't take a break at once, you could try the usual tricks such as opening a window or drinking strong coffee or tea. They might help for a short time but they are not reliable.

Need more advice

Feeling tired at work (often called fatigue) is a serious problem if safety is involved.

You can find out more from the guidance note given to your company. This includes advice about:

- diet and eating plans
- napping
- sleep disorders
- relaxation techniques.

You can also get more information and advice from these websites:

www.rssb.co.uk

www.sleepfoundation.org

www.sleepquest.com

