

Sleep, stress and the hidden cost of fatigue

The stress-sleep cycle

Stress and poor sleep reinforce each other. High workloads elevate cortisol, delaying sleep onset. Poor sleep reduces resilience, amplifying stress the following day. Left unaddressed, this cycle compounds into chronic fatigue, burnout and mental health issues.

Key facts:

Global

745,000

Deaths per year globally linked to working 55+ hours per week (WHO/ILO)¹

SEA

>60%

of working adults reported burnout in a 2024 regional study²

Singapore

60+ days

of lost productivity per year for employees with diagnosed sleep disorders¹²

Hong Kong

>50%

of adults experience work-related fatigue, with 36% lacking the energy to spend time with family and friends after work⁵

Japan

~4 in 10

Adults sleeping fewer than six hours per night⁴

APAC

Highest globally

APAC records some of the highest rates of long working hours globally⁶

Fatigue

as a potential workforce risk



Why it matters to organisations

Potential hidden costs to organisations

What organisations can consider supporting in



Reduced productivity & quality

Lower concentration, slower decision-making, diminished output



Reviewing policies on working hours, overtime and on-call expectations



Higher absenteeism and presenteeism

More sick leave taken and employees remaining at work despite prolonged fatigue



Establishing clear norms around digital communication outside of working hours



Increased errors & safety risks

More prone to errors, particularly in safety-critical roles



Ensuring recovery time is built into shift patterns and project timelines



Rising mental health strain

Higher rates of anxiety, depression and burnout



Addressing leadership behaviours that normalise or reward overwork



Increased turnover risk

Difficulty retaining experienced employees



Incorporating sleep and fatigue into EAPs and wider wellbeing strategies

6 evidence-based sleep habits

HOWDEN

While organisational change takes time, small individual habits can make a meaningful difference. These practices can help support sleep, energy and daily resilience.



Keep a consistent sleep routine

Consistent sleep and wake times, including weekends, support the body clock and improve sleep quality.



Set a digital cut-off

Reduce screen time and work-related messages an hour before bed. Blue light disrupts melatonin production, while work content keeps the brain in an alert state.



Create a wind-down routine

Light stretching, reading or short breathing exercises can help lower stress hormones and ease the transition into sleep.



Be strategic with caffeine

Caffeine can remain in the system for five to six hours. Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and evening to reduce the risk of delayed sleep onset.



Address sleep debt

Frequent weekend recovery may signal ongoing sleep debt during the working week.



Speak up early

Persistent tiredness, poor concentration and irritability are early signs of fatigue. Employees are encouraged to raise concerns with their manager or access available wellbeing and EAP support.

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For references visit: <https://www.howdengroup.com/sleep-stress-hidden-cost-of-fatigue-asia-workforce>