

# TOOLBOX TALK #8

## Sleep Deprivation & Exhaustion



*As skilled tradespeople, you put in the long hours, early mornings, overnights, and physically demanding work day in and day out. You push through the heat, cold, noise, and stress - and you do it with pride. But there is one thing no one can power through safely: sleep deprivation and exhaustion. Not getting enough rest does not just make you feel tired - it puts you and your crew at risk. Exhaustion impairs your reaction time, focus, and decision-making, just like alcohol or drugs. Let's take a moment to recognize the dangers of sleep deprivation and what we can do to show up alert, safe, and ready every day.*

### What is Sleep Deprivation

**Sleep deprivation** happens when you consistently do not get enough quality sleep - typically less than 7 hours per night for adults. It builds up over time. You may think you are used to "running on fumes," but your body and brain are still suffering the effects. **Exhaustion** goes beyond just feeling tired. It is physical, mental, and emotional fatigue that can affect your health and performance.

### The Long-Term Toll

Not only does sleep deprivation and exhaustion affect your safety and focus in the short term - but it also chips away at your long-term health. Chronic sleep loss does not just make you groggy - it puts strain on almost every system in your body.

- **Heart Health:** Regular poor sleep increases your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.
- **Immune System:** Less sleep means your body has a harder time fighting off illness and recovering from injury.
- **Mental Health:** Chronic fatigue is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress. Over time, it affects your ability to cope with life's pressures - on and off the job site.
- **Pain & Recovery:** Your body repairs itself during deep sleep. Without it, joint and muscle pain can increase, and recovery from daily wear and tear slows down.

Small improvements to your sleep can lower these risks and help you feel stronger, sharper, and healthier.

## GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. How do you handle shift changes, early starts, or long stretches without days off when it comes to rest and recovery?
2. What is one small thing about your sleep or rest habits that you will commit to changing this week to help improve your rest going forward?

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### Signs and Symptoms

You might be sleep-deprived if you notice:

- Frequent yawning or heavy eyelids
- Trouble concentrating or staying focused
- Short temper or mood changes
- Slower reaction times
- Forgetfulness or confusion
- Relying on caffeine or energy drinks just to function

### The Safety Risks Are Real

- **Delayed reactions** can make you miss hazards or misjudge timing with tools and machinery.
- **Poor focus** increases the chances of missing critical steps in your task.
- **Impaired judgment** leads to riskier decisions - whether climbing scaffolds, lifting materials, or operating machinery or vehicles.
- **Microsleeps** (brief, uncontrollable lapses in attention) can occur on the job - without warning.

**According to the National Safety Council, workers are 70% more likely to be involved in a workplace accident when fatigued.**

### Ways to Improve Sleep and Exhaustion

Getting good sleep does not have to be a luxury. Start with making small changes and build better habits.

- **Wind down before bed.** Turn off screens 30-60 minutes before sleeping. Try stretching, listening to music, or reading instead.
- **Watch what you eat and drink.** Avoid caffeine in the afternoon and skip heavy meals right before bed.
- **Nap smart.** A quick 15-20 minute nap (if time allows) can boost alertness without grogginess.
- **Create a sleep-friendly space.** Make your bedroom or nap area dark, quiet, and cool.
- **Speak up if you begin noticing signs.** If work or life stress is making it hard to sleep, talk to someone - your foreman, a steward, a business representative, or a professional resource.

### You Earned That Rest

You give work 100% on the job. Give your body and mind what they need to recover. Sleep is not a sign of weakness - it is a tool, just like a hard hat or harness, that protects you and those around you. Every crew member deserves to go home safe. Staying well-rested helps make sure we all do. **Stay sharp. Stay safe.**

**988 Lifeline**

**TEAM 1-800-634-7710**

*Additional resources can be found at [www.northcountrycarpenter.org/mental-health](http://www.northcountrycarpenter.org/mental-health)*