

MANAGING FATIGUE AND BURNOUT

First responders and other public safety personnel are uniquely at risk for fatigue and burnout. What is fatigue, and what can you do about it?

COMMON SIGNS OF FATIGUE



Cognitive – sleepiness, hyperarousal, sensory overload



Physical – muscular fatigue or weakness, reduced physical abilities



Perceptual – eye strain, difficulty focusing, reduced reaction time



Emotional – emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, detachment



Burnout – chronic physical, emotional and mental exhaustion

HEALTH AND WELLNESS IMPACTS



Musculoskeletal disorders

e.g., back pain, repetitive strain injuries

Compromised immune function

i.e., decreased ability to ward off infection



Cardiovascular disorders

e.g., coronary artery disease

Injury, accidents, performance deficits

e.g., decreased work productivity



RISK FACTORS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL



Insufficient sleep quality/duration



Extended wakefulness



Time pressures



Exertion and repetition



Stress



Shift work

REMEMBER

- Everyone experiences fatigue
- There is no one-size-fits-all approach
- Fatigue is a shared responsibility and your organization should plan for appropriate staffing and scheduling
- It is important to know and respect your limits

RECOGNIZE

- Fatigue is influenced by many factors, including your workload and work intensity
- We adapt to stress and fatigue and often underestimate our own fatigue levels

COMMUNICATE

- The people we are closest to can support us, but only when they understand what's happening
- Tell your friends, family, and coworkers about what you are feeling and experiencing

UNDERSTAND

- There IS help for excessive fatigue
- It is NOT necessarily 'part of the job'
- Seek treatment or referral from your primary care physician – the earlier the better



A STUDY OF PARAMEDICS

A 2021 study of paramedics in Ontario found sleep-related fatigue to be the most commonly experienced type of fatigue, with almost ¼ of respondents reporting moderate to severe excessive daytime sleepiness.

The study also found that fatigue risk increased with an increase in calls (four or more), and with the number and complexity of interventions performed per shift.

TAKEAWAY



Meaningful strategies to manage fatigue must consider many different aspects of the job, including call complexity and their physical, mental, and emotional demands.

Yung et al. (2021) Developing a Canadian fatigue risk management standard for first responders: Defining the scope. *Safety Science*, 134.



VIDEO SERIES ON FATIGUE AND BURNOUT

REFERENCES

CIPSRT (2025, February 26) *Running on empty: Managing fatigue and burnout among first responders and other PSP*. Available at: <https://youtu.be/pVETV0S76hg>
CIPSRT (2025, March 26) *Running on empty: Answering your questions about fatigue and burnout among first responders and other PSP*. Available at: https://youtu.be/8wy6_AKm-RQ

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