



WHY EMPLOYEES NEED BETTER SLEEP & HOW TO HELP



INTRODUCTION

You may have experienced the effects of sleep deprivation at least once, and may be part of the 40%¹ of U.S. employees who suffer from it. Yet, the negative impact of sleep deprivation is bigger than you may think. Insufficient sleep is linked to a number of physical, emotional, and social factors that affect individuals and companies alike.

Read on and you'll learn:

- How poor sleep affects employee health
- The dangerous impact sleep deprivation has on businesses
- Ways to help employees reclaim a good night's sleep



CONTEXT

There is a tendency to boast about needing little sleep to function. “I’ll sleep when I’m dead” is a refrain heard in elevators, offices and meeting rooms across our country. Companies that expect stellar results consider all-nighters a sign of virtue. Placing importance on getting a full night’s sleep has been stigmatized as a sign of laziness.

While U.S. businesses strive to increase efficiency, the importance of quality sleep tends to be overlooked.

Up to 70 million U.S. adults suffer from a chronic sleep disorder and **1 in 3 gets less than seven hours of sleep.**²

The short-term gain associated with less sleep and more work takes a toll on employees’ long-term health, safety, resilience, productivity, and tenure. Unfortunately, the average amount of sleep hours for U.S. workers has fallen from 8 hours in the 1940s to 6.8 hours today.³

WHY WE CAN'T SLEEP

It's not uncommon to wonder "why can't I sleep?" at night. Thinking about it can then lead to worry, feelings of hopelessness and, ultimately, to a sleepless night. Beside dwelling on problems, sleep loss can be attributed to:


- longer commutes
- longer working hours⁴
- screen time^{5 6} before bed
- obesity
- anxiety
- depression

These factors, coupled with an ever-increasing need to fit more into our lives, have helped to create a sleep-deprived nation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Modern economies are affected by lower productivity levels and high mortality risks related to sleep deprivation. The U.S. loses up to \$411 billion annually as a result of lower, or lost, productivity linked to insufficient sleep. That's the equivalent of 1.23 million working days, or 9.9 million working hours lost due to insufficient sleep.⁷

Sleep loss can cause **fatigue-related productivity losses of up to an estimated \$1,967 per employee annually.**⁸



CONSEQUENCES OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

Sleep is not a bank account. The idea that one can recoup the debt on the weekends is largely a myth. Workers with unbalanced sleep schedules can find that their focus and attention are adversely affected for extended time periods.⁹

○ THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH

Our physiology, behavior, and emotions are regulated by sleep. People who don't get enough sleep are more likely to suffer from **hypertension, diabetes, depression, heart disease**¹⁰, **cancer**¹¹, and other health problems that may seem unrelated to sleep.

Employees who sleep fewer than 6 hours a day are nearly 30% more likely to be overweight; this often leads to other serious medical issues.¹²

○ LOSE SLEEP, GAIN WEIGHT

Sleep deprived employees will often try to raise energy levels during the day with an extra snack. Lack of sleep affects the appetite hormone balance, inducing stronger cravings for high calorie foods.¹³ **People who sleep less than 6 hours per night consume, on average, 385 more calories the next day,** and show a preference for fats over proteins.¹⁴

○ NO ONE IS IMMUNE, NOT EVEN THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Sleep loss makes the human body more susceptible to infectious diseases. Even one week of reduced sleep affects the body's production of the essential elements it needs to fight infections.¹⁵ **Getting less than 5 hours of sleep per night increases the risk of developing influenza symptoms by four times.**¹⁶

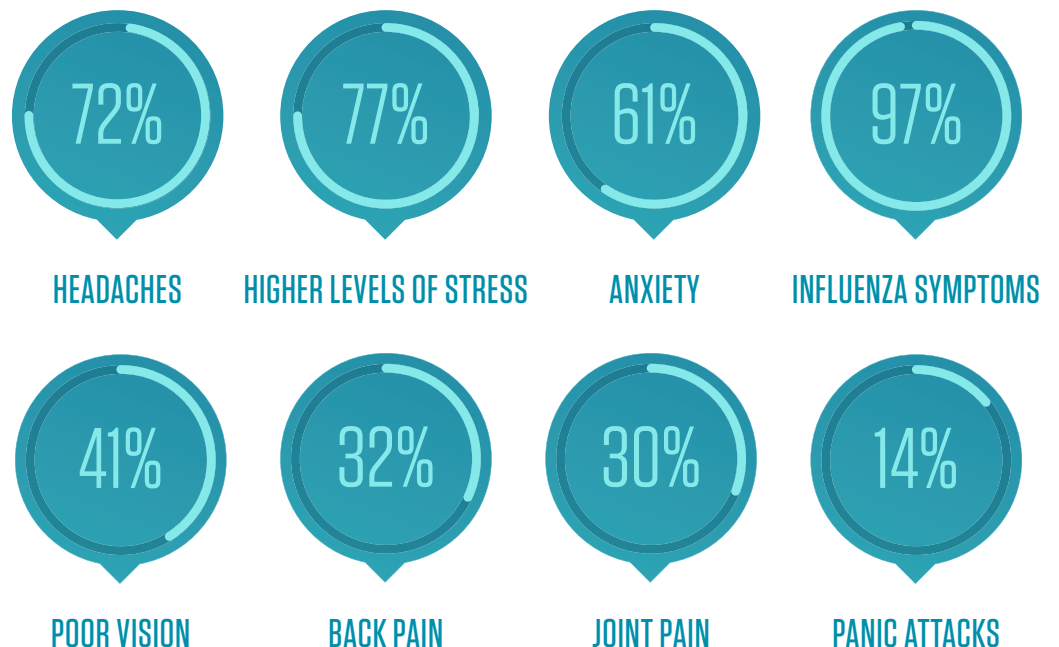
○ IT'S NOT ALL SUGAR AND SPICE

Sleeping less than 5 hours per night for a week can drastically reduce insulin sensitivity, even in healthy people.¹⁷ **People that suffer from insomnia are 1.5 times more likely to develop diabetes over a 10 year-period than those who get regular amounts of quality sleep.**¹⁸

○ UNFIT FOR WORK

Some employees that suffer from sleep loss have reported a series of physical symptoms, which they may ignore or misattribute to other causes.

Employees that took part in a sleep deficiency study reported:¹⁹

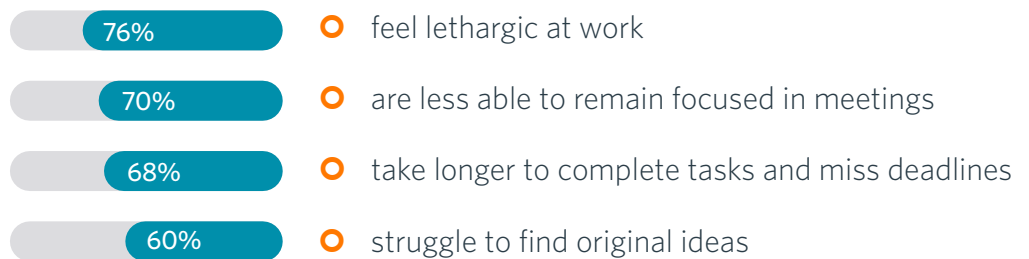


○ THE ROOT CAUSE OF PERFORMANCE ISSUES

Tasks that require sustained attention are the most affected by sleep loss. Lack of energy and poor vision are dangerous side effects for people who need to react quickly, such as car service drivers and surgeons.

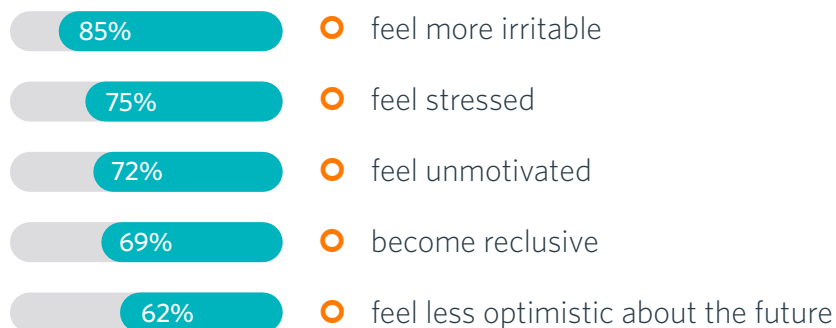
The incidence of car accidents related to sleep loss is high, as **36% of drivers admitted to nodding off while driving.**²⁰

After a poor night's sleep, an employee will not be at his best:²¹



○ THE DOMINO EFFECT

Many sleep-deprived employees feel that adapting to challenging situations takes up more of their energy. When trying to make it through the day after a difficult night's sleep, employees:²¹



HOW TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE SLEEP

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Talking to employees and surveying them regarding their sleep habits is the best way to collect data and assess the situation in your organization. Sleep is an employee's personal business and talking about it may feel too intrusive, so be mindful during conversations. Identify habits in your organization that could account for sleep loss. Keep an eye out for busy schedules, heavy workloads and everything in between that may keep employees up at night.

Bringing work computers home, answering business calls after work, and responding to late night e-mails because of an “always on” office culture, can lead to sleep deprivation.

By showing concern, you can make employees feel better about themselves, the workplace and about adopting a new set of healthy habits.

LEADING THE WAY

Adopting a sleep-friendly culture with employees will make them more open to changing their behavior and lifestyle.

More flexible working hours, walking meetings, napping pods, and private rooms for relaxation or meditation can help remove some of the daily work stress and help employees sleep better at night.

○ “Middle of the night” thinking

Before bed, thinking and dwelling on problems can keep employees up at night. Teaching them how to create a healthy and effective pre-sleep routine, and how to use specific mental tactics to calm their minds can make a big difference.

○ Sleep stealers education

Inform your employees of the most common “sleep stealers” that affect their nightly routine, such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, heavy and spicy foods and late-night screen time.

○ A holistic employee benefit program

A proven way to make a positive change in employees’ lives is to offer them a comprehensive wellbeing program that includes quality sleep.

MOVING FROM WELLNESS TO WELLBEING

More than half of employers struggle to maintain affordable health care for their employees.²² In the past, wellness programs focused solely on exercise, nutrition, or addiction. Good health means more than just physical wellness. Rather than waiting for diseases to occur, organizations are focusing on illness prevention by sustaining the overall physical, psychological health and wellbeing of employees.

Now employers are starting to understand the importance of **a holistic wellbeing approach.**
Well-rested employees have the mental energy and resilience needed to change or sustain other healthy behaviors, like exercising and healthy eating.

Sleep is a critical feature of a robust wellbeing program since it helps employees make long lasting positive behavior changes.

SLEEP, THE NEXT FRONTIER IN WELLBEING

TRACKING SLEEP

As wearable technology is projected to grow up to \$70 billion by 2025²³, gathering data on sleep has never been easier.

When employees can track their average sleep time, bedtime and sleep score, they will feel more empowered to develop healthy sleep habits.

One way to improve sleep is to create achievable sleep goals. Research recommends seven to nine hours of sleep per day. While moving from five to eight hours may seem unrealistic, slowly increasing sleep time for 30 minutes or more per week can improve the chances of sustained success.

A wellbeing program that uses data is your organization's best chance to help employees turn behaviors into life-changing habits.

WHY YOU NEED TO MAKE SLEEP YOUR BUSINESS

Engaging employees in understanding the effects of sleep loss and helping them create positive life-changing habits will benefit both them and your organization.

By implementing a comprehensive wellbeing program that puts quality sleep as the foundation of health, you will:

- improve employee health and wellbeing
- improve alertness and concentration
- reduce long-term health problems
- decrease stress and other work-related illness
- reduce risk of accidents
- increase productivity and cooperation
- increase staff morale, satisfaction, and motivation
- reduce health-related litigation
- reduce sick leave and workers' compensation claims
- reduce worker turnover
- attract new employees better than before

At the end of the day **happy, healthy, and engaged employees produce more and cost less.**



CONCLUSION

Science proves that our physical, mental and emotional balance depends on adequate sleep. Understanding how sleep affects work-life balance, life satisfaction and work performance is key to creating a forward-thinking, positive workplace culture.

Over time, organizations that integrate sleep health by moving from wellness to holistic wellbeing programs are likely to see increases in employee satisfaction, enhanced productivity and the tangible benefits that only a good night's sleep can provide.

If you would like to learn how to help
your employees get a good night's sleep, please contact us.

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ABOUT VIRGIN PULSE

Virgin Pulse, part of Sir Richard Branson's famed Virgin Group, helps employers create workforces that are happier, healthier and ultimately more productive in all aspects of their personal and professional lives.

The company's modern, mobile-first platform delivers a personalized user experience that utilizes gamification to engage users in building habits that inspire meaningful and measurable change across individuals and the business.

By helping employees thrive at work and in all aspects of life, Virgin Pulse is helping change lives and businesses for good.

Unlike narrowly focused employee health solutions, Virgin Pulse's solutions span the full wellbeing spectrum – from traditional wellness to strategic wellbeing – providing organizations with solutions that are appropriate for them today and tomorrow.

More than 3,000 organizations representing many of the Fortune 500 and Best Places to Work have selected Virgin Pulse solutions to engage their workforces and drive their businesses forward.

ENDNOTES

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