

Prioritizing sleep for good health



If your organization is addressing healthy lifestyle factors for your workers — from nutrition and exercise to smoking cessation — don't forget the multitude of ways you can invest in sleep health.

The CDC has long declared that sleep deprivation in the U.S. is a public health epidemic. That sentiment is echoed in a new American Academy of Sleep Medicine position paper and in the recently launched Healthy People 2030 initiative, which focus on sleep as a biological necessity and sleep disorders as detrimental to health, well-being and public safety.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), along with the Sleep Research Society, recommend adults sleep seven or more hours per night on a regular basis for optimal health. The CDC found that 32.5 percent of adults

fail to get sufficient sleep on a regular basis, while the Maternal and Child Health Bureau found 34.1 percent of children and 74.6 percent of high school students do not get an adequate amount of sleep.

Healthy People 2030, under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, sets measurable public health objectives in 10-year increments. For our current decade, sleep-related priorities include helping people get enough sleep, treating sleep disorders and decreasing drowsy driving. The specific objectives

for the initiative's Sleep Health Workgroup are:

- Increase the proportion of adults who get enough sleep
- Increase the proportion of adults with sleep apnea symptoms who get evaluated by a health care provider
- Increase the proportion of high school students who get enough sleep
- Reduce the rate of motor vehicle crashes due to drowsy driving

While the importance of sleep is widely recognized by scientists and government entities, it has

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not made the same inroads in our culture, where sleep is often a secondary consideration or, worse, where sleep deprivation is subject to bragging rights.

Study after study has outlined the consequences of insufficient sleep and untreated sleep disorders. The AASM emphasizes that chronic insufficient sleep is associated with an increased risk of mortality and increases risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and cancer. In addition, sleep disturbances such as insomnia commonly co-occur with mental health and mood problems including depression and anxiety, with bi-directional exacerbation.

The role of the workplace

Prioritizing sleep health in our society needs a multipronged approach. It should be emphasized in education, clinical practice, inpatient and long-term care, public health promotion and the workplace, according to the AASM.

The workplace plays an essential role in this prioritization, which can take a number of different forms. The CDC, in its Workplace Health Brief, Sleep: An Important

Health and Safety Concern at Work, advises that employers can help their workers get adequate sleep and better sleep quality through evidence-based workplace health programs. In culling through decades' worth of studies, additional suggested workplace interventions cited by the AASM include:

- providing a sleep education program for all employees
- permitting short naps during work breaks
- establishing fatigue risk management systems
- referring workers with sleep problems to a health care provider or accredited sleep center
- modifying environmental factors to promote worker well-being and alertness

Not only would these interventions reduce worker fatigue and improve sleep, but they are associated with reduced absenteeism/presenteeism and improved performance, which are beneficial to the employer, and better overall quality of life for the employee.

Prioritizing sleep health in our society needs a multipronged approach.



Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Workplace Health Resource Center. Sleep: an important health and safety concern at work; Hafner M et al. (2016) Why sleep matters — the economic costs of insufficient sleep: a cross-country comparative analysis, RAND Corporation; Healthy People 2030; Kannan, R et al. (2021) Sleep is essential to health: an American Academy of Sleep Medicine position statement, Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine; Redeker NS et al. (2019) Workplace interventions to promote sleep health and an alert, healthy workforce. J Clin Sleep Med.