

SAFETY MEMO

January 3rd, 2022 – *Fatigue and Stress*



Did you know?

Introduction

Often, it feels like there is not enough time in the day to complete all the tasks that need to be done. Whether it is work related project, home life and personal relationships, or other pursuits and hobbies, there are many tasks and items demanding our attention.



Long Work Hours and Death

Between 2000 and 2016, the World Health Organization conducted two systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the latest evidence of long working hours. Data from 37 studies on ischemic heart disease covering more than 768,000 participants and 22 studies on stroke covering more than 839,000 participants were synthesized. The study covered global, regional and national levels, and was based on data from more than 2,300 surveys collected in 154 countries from 1970-2018¹.

The study concluded that working 55 hours or more per week was associated with an estimated 35 per cent increase in the risk of suffering a stroke, and a 17 per cent rise in the risk of dying from ischemic heart disease, compared to working 35 to 40 hours.

In particular, cardiovascular diseases caused by long working hours disproportionately affects people who identify as one or more of the following:

- Western Pacific & South-East Asia
- People aged 60-74
- Male

Additionally, excessive work hours increase the risk of occupational injuries especially in industries such as construction and manufacturing.

What can an individual person do?

Understanding how long work hours affect physical and mental health is the first step. Implementing an action plan to reduce stress levels is the next.

- Spread your work tasks out to others who have fewer demands on their schedules
- Take microbreaks
 - Every 20min, stand up for 2min
- Go for a walk at lunch – this also helps to stimulate the creative juices when stuck on particularly challenging issues
- Maintain a good sleep habit. A normal duration of sleep is 7 to 8 hours
- Good nutrition habits
- Limit alcohol and drug use
- Seek supportive services such as therapy, counselling, or speaking with your health care provider

What can an employer do?

With so much at stake, it can be very difficult to find a balance that meets all business needs. Some suggestions to prevent occupational injuries and reduce employee burnout:

- Conduct intensive accident hazard identification and control procedures that are focussed on jobs where employees work extreme overtime schedules
- Implement mandatory periodic and scheduled work breaks
- Redesign processes to avoid the need for overtime assignments
- Employing more people to work fewer hours
- Ergonomic redesign to decrease job demands
- Abiding by posted jurisdiction maximum working hours legislation

¹ Environment International. (Sept 2021). Global, regional, and national burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke attributable to exposure to long working hours for 194 countries, 2000–2016: A

systematic analysis from the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury. (Vol 154). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2021.106595>.

