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# FIGHTING FATIGUE

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*"They were dull-eyed, bodily worn and too tired to think connectedly. Even a 30-minute flop on the turf with the stars for a blanket would have doubled the power of their bodies and quickened their minds. I spoke jerkily, in phrases because I could not remember the thought which had preceeded what I said".*

Marshall - 'Night Drops'

**T**his brochure is designed to help you survive the accelerated pace of deployments and exercises.

You may be asked to work long hours at unusual times of the night, sometimes for weeks at a time. This pace drains your energy, promotes poor sleeping habits and eventually results in long-term fatigue.

Fatigue can be the most dangerous foe to contend with during sustained operations. It is dismissed as a necessary risk and all too often with deadly consequences. It is not a sign of stamina or endurance to forgo sleep nor is it a sign of "age" to need sleep. Fatigue can rob you of the most meaningful capacity of your senses and drastically reduce your ability to focus or to react. Nothing can replace sleep as a revitalizer. However, this brochure provides guidance on improving the quality of sleep and, when necessary, how to combat fatigue while on duty. These steps can dramatically reduce the operational risks that originate from fatigue.

# Power Naps

Naps help relieve fatigue, especially during extended or nighttime work hours. A few minutes of napping can provide hours of extra alertness. Both types of power naps, short and long, are based on the fact that it is more difficult to wake up from certain stages of sleep than others. They are timed to avoid awakening during the deeper stages of sleep. You'll feel awake and alert with improved capacity to focus on the tasks at hand.

## Short Power Nap

The short power nap prevents you from entering the deeper stages of sleep, yet gives you enough rest to keep you alert, perhaps, to get through the long early morning hours. Find a comfortable place to stretch out and set an alarm for 15-20 minutes. These naps are best when you only have a few minutes to spare and you know you could be more effective with just a brief sleep.

## Long Power Nap

By sleeping longer than 3 hours, you pass through the deeper stages of sleep—the difficult ones from which to awaken. This nap works best if you are extremely tired, have an extended day ahead, or if you need to work into or through the night. Take a long power nap on a comfortable bed. Any longer than 4 hours might make it difficult to get to bed later.

Power naps should not be near (within 5 or 6 hours) your normal nighttime sleep.

Power naps are no substitute for proper rest. They are extra help when you are awake longer than normal.



## Staying awake, staying alert - it's not easy

There are times when staying awake seems almost unbearable, especially between 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. Everyone has their personal list of 'tricks' that work for them. Some actually work -- some don't. However, there are techniques that help to make it easier to stay alert and productive.

Just washing your face or brushing your teeth has an invigorating effect.

Move around to keep your blood pressure and heart rate from falling too low. A brief 5-10 minute exercise interval can combat fatigue. Stretching or isometrics can help too.

Staying awake in the early morning hours is compounded by dim light. Use brighter lights to illuminate your workplace. If your environment must be dark, find a bright place and stay there for at least 30 minutes. This might be a great time to exercise too. Alternatively, if you can get away

for 30 minutes, consider taking a short power nap.

Foods low in carbohydrates or high in protein help fight fatigue. Sugar can give a boost. However, sugary foods need to be consumed at about 45 minute intervals in order to avoid a 'sugar crash'. Drink lots of water or juice. Healthy meals, fruits, vegetables and dairy products, like yogurt, are a must. If you don't have an opportunity to use a dining facility, bring your own meal.

Caffeine is an excellent way to extract a few more alert hours. Drink a strong cup of coffee or soda every 3-4 hours to help maintain an adequate amount of caffeine in your body. Too much caffeine can lead to stomach upset and headaches.

Learn to recognize symptoms of fatigue in yourself and others and demand that adequate rest be part of the mission plan.

# Quality sleep is not just a dream

We need 7-8 hours of sleep a night and this is as vital as getting adequate food or water.

An important fatigue survival technique is consistency. Getting to bed at the same time or very near the same time every night is perhaps the most important habit to develop. Have breakfast when you wake up and other meals at consistent times. A regular exercise routine is helpful too. Consistency in these routines during deployments is often hard, but not impossible.

Avoid excessive alcohol about 2-3 hours before bed. You may sleep for a few hours but you risk awakening in about 3 hours with insomnia.

Avoid stimulants (coffee, chocolate, soft drinks, tea) about 5-8 hours before bed. Although some people feel coffee doesn't impair their sleep, that sleep will be less restful after caffeine.

Soaking in a very warm bath can be relaxing.

Stay in shape. Regular exercise keeps you healthy and helps you get tired.

Complex carbohydrates (pastas, cereals, breads, rice) and foods rich in tryptophan (fowl, legumes) can promote sleep. For example, try warm milk or chicken soup.

Don't prop your pillow up too high. If you sleep on your back, your chin can collapse into your chest and cause your breathing to stop until you awaken. If you sleep on your stomach, high elevation of your pillow can cause back pain.

Make your sleep environment optimal. Set the temperature where you like it. Get the pillows and covers just right. Find out if any of your medications impair sleep. For example, avoid

aspirin, ibuprofen or propranolol before bed, as these may disturb your sleep. Use cloth covered light protectors for your eyes if you are trying to sleep in a lighted environment. Similarly, use noise protectors for your ears if it is too noisy.

If you snore excessively, have frequent awakenings or sleep restlessly, have a specialist evaluate you for sleep disorders.

Many of us don't sleep well, especially prior to a long day or stressful event. If you're one of those who can "sleep anywhere, at a moment's notice" then you are likely someone who is dangerously sleep deprived or not sleeping well.

Ultimately you are responsible for the quality of your sleep. Take the steps to ensure that the quality of your sleep has a positive effect on the quality of your day.

