

Good sleep, nutrition necessary to start work day off right

By Norma James
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How ready are you to perform the tasks of your job safely?

Everyone should ask themselves this question every day before they go to work: "Am I physically and mentally ready to take on the demands of my job?"

Did you receive six to eight hours of restful, uninterrupted sleep last night? Sleep is the way the body renews itself to deal with the stresses and strains of daily life.

Most adults require six to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep each day, during which the body goes through different stages of sleep.

The deeper stages are said to be the most restorative. Sleep that is adequate in quantity and quality is necessary for health, well being and the ability to do your job safely.

Did you eat a substantial meal before going to work? The first meal of your day should be well-balanced — low in fat, high in energy foods and substantial enough to get your body ready for the effort that you will need to do your job.

And watch that caffeine intake. Too much caffeine can make you jittery and unco-ordinated, and impair manual dexterity.

The more physically and mentally demanding your job is, the more you will need adequate fuel for you to perform safely.

Are you feeling 100 per cent? Do you have a health problem? Are you receiving treatment? Are you aware of what that treatment is supposed to be doing? Are you aware of the reasons why you are taking a certain medication? Do you know what the side effects of the medication?

Ask your doctor and the pharmacist what the medication is supposed to do and in what time frame. Ask how the different drugs you are taking interact with one another.

Remember to ask how over-the-counter and herbal medications might interact with the medication.

Don't forget about that pill you've been taking for years. Just because you have been on it for a long time, without any problems, doesn't mean it won't react differently when some new pill is added.

Have you been told some of your medication may cause drowsiness and impair mental or physical abilities for the performance of hazardous tasks such as driving a car or operating machinery?

Ask your doctor and pharmacist about this.

If your job involves such activities, tell your doctor. There may be a less hazardous but equally effective medication that could be prescribed.

Be careful with combinations of drugs. Sometimes a single drug is not a problem, but, when another is added, the combined effects are.

If your doctor has prescribed a painkiller, ask about the side effects.

Did you know, for example, that Tylenol 1, 2 and 3 all contain codeine? Codeine is a narcotic. It can cause drowsiness, impair your judgment and alter your ability to perform tasks requiring timing and co-ordination. Because the drug impairs your judgment, you think you are not having side effects, but, in reality, you are.

Add a muscle relaxant that has similar side effects and you've got a potentially dangerous combination.

Don't forget some over-the-counter cold and flu remedies have the same side effects as prescription drugs. Read the labels carefully. Take these medicines as directed on the label. More is not better.

Don't forget about alcohol consumption. Alcohol intake prior to going to work is asking for trouble.

Alcohol added to medications can sometimes increase the inability to perform mentally or physically challenging work. The other detrimental outcome of drinking while taking some medication may cause damage to vital organs or prevent the action of the drug.

If you have consumed fairly heavily in the past few hours, it may not be completely cleared from your body prior to getting in that truck.

Generally, it takes about one hour for your body to get rid of one ounce of alcohol. So, if you were out drinking until closing time, then get up for your shift at 6 a.m., you'll still be under the influence.

It is your right and responsibility to work safely. Be aware of the things that can help make you at that 100 per cent.

Ask questions, read labels, do the things you already know are necessary for good health. It's really not that difficult!

• **Norma James is a registered nurse with the Occupational Health Clinic (Sudbury). If you have an occupational health topic you would like addressed in a future column, contact the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. at 523-2330.**