



Fighting the **FATIGUE** Factor

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In today's high-paced Air Force, adequate rest is vital to combat capability.

Sleep is not one of those things that you can do without. The mind may be willing, but if you have not gotten enough sleep, the body isn't always up to it due to fatigue. Sleep is an absolute necessity for life, is very easy to ignore, but is also one of the easiest biological needs to satisfy ...

Photo by SSgt Bennie J. Davis III

The most common reason for fatigue is a lack of sleep. Sleep is a requirement for your body just like food and water. Most folks need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. If you suffer from drowsiness during the day, it is a good indicator that you may not be getting enough sleep at night. The solution, of course, is more sleep, which is often easier said than done.

To fight the fatigue battle there are several things you can do. You can be consistent, you can put off the caffeine, you can eat complex carbohydrates, and you can optimize your sleep environment.

Consistency is one of the key factors in battling fatigue. Getting to bed at close to the same time every day (this includes the weekends) is one of the most important things you can do to improve your quality of sleep. Regular meals and exercise are also beneficial in keeping the body's clock on time.

Push the caffeine back at least 3-5 hours before going to bed. Caffeine may not prevent you from falling asleep, but the sleep you do get is usually restless. Likewise, alcohol is often used to unwind in the evening. The warning flag goes up for excessive alcohol, as it disrupts some sleep patterns and can result in increasing fatigue.

Eat complex carbohydrates. Pastas, cereals, breads, rice, and foods rich in tryptophan (turkey, peanut butter, cottage cheese, milk, chicken) can promote sleep. Give warm milk or chicken soup a try before going to bed.

Optimize your sleep environment. Set the temperature



where you like it. A quality, comfortable mattress is well worth its cost. Pillows propped up too high in some people can block the airway and cause awakenings. Light sleepers should try ear plugs for the neighbor's barking dogs. "White noise" makers, such as a humming fan can also help to block out sounds. Cloth light protectors over the eyes and/or room darkening shades may improve sleep, especially for the shift worker who is trying to sleep during the day.

Fatigue is a major factor in many of the aviation and ground mishaps the Air Force experiences every year. Fatigue's effects can be insidious and hard to recognize, but can have catastrophic results. Some fatigue dangers include microsleep — that 1 second nap you take behind the wheel at 60 mph eats up 88 feet of asphalt! Without sleep, you have slowed reaction times and are irritable to your coworkers. Add to that long hours, shift work, and crossing time zones and you can have a negative impact on your job performance. Many believe that a person who goes 36 hours without sleep has the same reaction times and makes the same decisions as a legally intoxicated person. Actually, the ACC surgeon general states that the intoxication reaction effect occurs following a much shorter sleepless schedule. After 17 hours of no sleep, some aspects of your performance are degraded to the same extent as being intoxicated with a Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) of 0.05 percent. After being awake for 24 hours, your performance is decreased to that observed with a BAC of 0.10 percent. So don't make the mistake of not getting enough sleep. Your life and the lives of others are counting on your ability to properly count sheep! ▶

Lifestyle is a major factor in battling fatigue ...