

Watchstander Fatigue - Signs, Symptoms, Solutions

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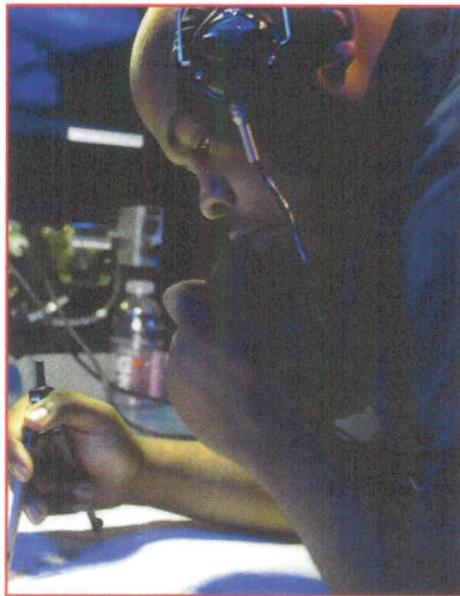
Watchstander fatigue is a growing concern among Line leadership in Navy operational communities, and anyone who has ever served at sea during night time operations, low-visibility, bad weather or underway replenishments (to name a few) understands the potential consequences associated with ineffective watchstanding.

Many Americans experience sleep quality problems, and this is especially true of Sailors serving with operational units, where watchstanding duties add to the rigors of a routinely busy workday.

According to psychologist Dr. Mark Long of the Health Promotion and Wellness Program at the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center, most people need between six and eight hours of sleep daily in order to function at their best.

"Often, American adults fall short by an hour or more each night, thus falling behind and not getting the necessary amount of rest needed and they end up feeling sleep deprived and tired," Long explained. "Some people think they can shave off and reduce their sleep periods to get more done and accomplished; however, this often catches up with them and reduces their effectiveness."

Common effects of insufficient sleep include lack of energy, attention lapses, slowed thinking and concentrating abilities, poor reaction time, irritability, poor judgment, increased stress and anxiety, increased accidents and a decrease in work productivity, all of which can



▲ OS2 Reginald Harlmon charts the ship's course in the combat information center aboard the amphibious command ship USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19). (MC2 Cynthia Griggs/USN)

certainly have ill affects when a Sailor is standing watch. There are numerous reasons and causes of insomnia, many of which pertain to the average Navy watchstander. The lists includes shift work, duty, changing work schedules, working long hours, time changes and traveling across time zones, and of course, stress.

"Stress often is a factor with sleep problems, which may be due to work, family, marital or interpersonal issues, and financial pressures," Long added.

While there are many strategies designed to improve the quality of rest and sleep, Long emphasized that there is no single or "universal" solution. He did point out that going to bed and getting up at the same time every day sets a routine and can help an individual get adequate sleep.

Other beneficial tips include getting regular exercise, pacing yourself during the day, reducing caffeine use, avoiding alcohol and nicotine, and not eating before bedtime.

Making sure that berthing temperature and mattress are both comfortable are also important factors.

"Relax before you go to bed," Long said. "If you are not able to sleep, rather than worrying and thinking, get up and do something relaxing until you are tired, and then return to bed."

For more information on sleep problems and other healthy living tips, visit the NMCPHC website at http://www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Healthy_Living/Psychological_Health/Stress_Management/stress_lifeissues.aspx

