

## EMS STAFF SAFETY NEWSLETTER

# TODAYS HEADLINES

### PARAMEDIC FALLS ASLEEP BEHIND WHEEL WITH 5 MONTH OLD PATIENT IN VEHICLE. PARTNER KILLED IN THE CRASH

INDIANA, 2018 - A paramedic from Mishawaka died Monday morning after an ambulance hit a car while transporting a patient.

Indiana State Police say the driver of the ambulance allegedly fell asleep prior to the crash.

A preliminary investigation found that Christine Wesner, a 26-year-old from Wyatt, was driving the ambulance southbound and failed to stop at a red light.

The ambulance hit a Dodge Dart driven by Joseph Farrar, a 30-year-old from Brownsburg.

The ambulance rolled onto its side, and 32-year-old paramedic Mousa Chaban was partially ejected. He died from his injuries.

A 5-month-old patient and the child's mother were also in the ambulance. They weren't injured in the crash.

The driver of the car was hospitalized with a broken collarbone, and his passenger suffered a head injury that isn't expected to be life-threatening.

Wesner and Chaban were working for Tri-County Ambulance Service based in Wakarusa. They were transporting the 5-month-old from a South Bend hospital to a hospital in Indianapolis.

This crash is still under investigation. At this time, no charges have been filed and police don't think that alcohol or narcotics contributed to the crash.

### OPPORTUNITY FOR LESSONS LEARNED

### FATIGUE IN EMS

The EMS industry is not an 8:00 - 5:00 type of job. As we all know, it's measured in 12's, 24's, 48's, 72's or even 96's. If proper awareness and consideration is not given to the issue of sleep deprivation and fatigue at every level in an EMS operation, serious consequences can result which may lead to disastrous outcomes.



Photo from incident discussed in blue box to left.  
Sleep deprivation can be dangerous to EMS workers.

Within the EMS industry, it is the fatigue and reduced level of performance can be the most dangerous side effects of sleep deprivation. Both decision making and coping skills are compromised when sleep deprivation is present. The accompanying fatigue can cause inattentiveness that, while on an emergency run, can manifest itself in a vehicle accident, judgmental flaws in treatment protocol and patient condition monitoring, as well as muscle strains from improper lifting procedures (due to fatigue). Shift supervisors as well as operations managers need to constantly monitor the fatigue levels of their employees as they relate to their sleep patterns while on their shift. You can't make up for having to work a 24, for instance, by sleeping twice as much the day before. **The human body doesn't work that way.**

## SIGNS OF SLEEP DEPRIVATION

There are steps we can follow to identify and address sleep deprivation. The first step is to recognize the signs and symptoms of sleep deprivation. A positive attitude, along with good nutrition and improved sleep habits can provide you with the basic tools needed to be successful during an emergency situation.

Your ability to make good decisions, control emotional situations and provide a stable and strong presence to the public can be enhanced with the proper amount of rest or sleep.

Generally, most people need about 1 hour of sleep for every 2 hours of wakefulness or approximately 8 hours of sleep a day to perform at their peak. Accumulated sleep deprivation contributes to a dramatic decrease in performance, mood, motivation, energy and sense of well being.

### Acute Sleep Deprivation and Risk of Motor Vehicle Crash *FDOT NHSTA Statistics*

Compared to drivers who had slept for at least 7 hours in the past 24 hours, drivers who reported they had slept:

- 6-7 hours had 1.3 times the crash rate
- 5-6 hours had 1.9 times the crash rate
- 4-5 hours had **4.3** times the crash rate
- Less than 4 hours had **11.5** times the crash rate

The negative consequences of sleep deprivation can contribute to increased stress, overeating, and a reduced level of performance. In one study, men who slept 4 hours a day had reduced levels of the hormone leptin (which signals fullness with eating). This may explain that some people who suffer from a lack of sleep tend to overeat and crave junk food. Sleep deprivation can contribute to higher stress levels and can negatively impact your physical, mental, emotional and behavioral conditions. This can lead to fatigue, frequent colds, indecisiveness, anger, depression, nervous habits and smoking or drinking.

There are many benefits of a good night's sleep. The key to breaking the sleep deprivation cycle begins with your personal attitude. The misguided notion that "a person who sleeps more than another is not as productive or is somehow lacking" is truly a myth! Getting the correct amount of sleep begins with knowing your own personal body needs.

The following are tips to help with getting the right amount of sleep and finding balance, when you are awake.

## SLEEP SUGGESTIONS FOR FIGHTING FATIGUE

A common cause of fatigue is not enough sleep, or poor quality sleep. Suggestions include:

- Get enough sleep – two-thirds of us suffer from sleep problems, and many people don't get the sleep they need to stay alert through the day. Some recommendations on getting a good night's sleep include: go to bed and get up in the morning at the same time every day, avoid naps through the day, and have a warm bath or shower before bed.
- Learn how to relax – a common cause of insomnia is fretting about problems while lying in bed. Experiment with different relaxation techniques until you find one or two that work for you.



- Avoid sleeping pills – sleeping pills are not a long-term solution because they don't address the causes of insomnia.

## DIETARY SUGGESTION FOR FIGHTING FATIGUE

Have a good look at your diet – suggestions include:

- Drink plenty of water – sometimes you feel tired simply because you're mildly dehydrated. A glass of water will help do the trick, especially after exercise.
- Eat breakfast – food boosts your metabolism and gives the body energy to burn. The brain relies on glucose for fuel, so choose carbohydrate-rich breakfast foods such as cereals or wholegrain bread.
- Don't skip meals – going without food for too long allows blood sugar levels to dip. Try to eat regularly to maintain your energy levels throughout the day.
- Eat a healthy diet – increase the amount of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods, low fat dairy products and lean meats in your diet. Reduce the amount of high fat, high sugar and high salt foods.



**LINK :** [How to eat healthy on an EMS Budget](#)

- Don't overeat – large meals can drain your energy. Instead of eating three big meals per day, try eating six mini-meals to spread your kilojoule intake more evenly.
- Eat iron rich foods – women, in particular, are prone to iron-deficiency (anaemia), which can lead to feeling fatigued. Make sure your diet includes iron-rich foods such as lean red meat.

## LIFESTYLE SUGGESTION FOR FIGHTING FATIGUE

Suggestions include:

- Increase physical activity – physical activity boosts energy levels, while a sedentary lifestyle is a known cause of fatigue. Physical activity has many good effects on the body and mind. Talk to your doctor if you haven't exercised in a long time, are obese, are aged over 40 years or have a chronic medical condition.



- Move more, sit less – reduce sedentary behaviors, and break up long bouts of sitting.
- Don't smoke – There are many reasons why smokers typically have lower energy levels than non-smokers. For the body to make energy it needs to combine glucose with oxygen, but the carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke reduces the amount of oxygen available in the blood.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES AND FATIGUE

Studies suggest that between 50 and 80 per cent of fatigue cases are mainly due to psychological factors. Suggestions include:

- Talk about it – There's some evidence that talking out loud about life challenges helps relieve stress and identify solutions.
- Reduce stress – Stress uses up a lot of energy. Try to introduce relaxing activities into your day. This could be listening to music, reading or spending time with friends. Whatever relaxes you will improve your energy.
- Assess your lifestyle – for example, are you putting yourself under unnecessary stress? Sometimes we like to own issues that really are not ours to resolve. When possible, let them go. You will notice the difference.
- Learn to do nothing – A hectic lifestyle is exhausting. Try to carve out a few more hours in your week to simply relax and hang out. If you can't find a few more hours, it may be time to rethink your priorities and commitments.



- Have more fun – maybe you're so preoccupied with commitments and pressures that you don't give yourself enough time for fun. Laughter is one of the best energy boosters around.

## HOW TO COPE WITH THE MID-SHIFT ENERGY SLUMP

Most people feel drowsy after lunch. This mid-shift drop in energy levels is linked to the brain's circadian rhythm and is 'hard wired' into the human body. Prevention may be impossible, but there are ways to reduce the severity of the slump, including:

- Incorporate as many of the suggested fatigue-fighting suggestions as you can into your lifestyle. A fit, healthy and well-rested body is less prone to severe drowsiness in the afternoon.
- Get moving. A brisk walk or even 10 minutes of stretching at your desk improves blood flow and boosts energy.



- Eat a combination of protein and carbohydrates for lunch, for example a tuna sandwich. Carbohydrates provide glucose for energy. Protein helps keep your mind attentive and alert.