

Maintaining Good Health During Winter Operations

Winter time finds public works and highway crews usually “stretched the limit” due to prolonged work hours. Whether it be a late night water main break, a coating of black ice on the roads or a full-blown blizzard, chances are employees will be working for extended hours. Just a few weeks ago, New Hampshire was hard hit by an ice storm requiring all municipal services employees to work countless hours without significant rest. One employee indicated he worked a 30 hour stint without any rest. While this is admirable and serves the “customer” well, a lack of sleep coupled with poor nutrition and exercise can lead to serious, long-term health issues. Snowplowing operations mostly involve sedentary actions. Operators are sitting in equipment for long hours and, unlike normal public works activities, exercise and movement are minimal. Coupled with easy access to high fat foods via fast food vendors who are often open at late hours, operators are at a “health disadvantage.”

There are solutions:

Pack healthy food to take along.

The Dietary Guidelines at MyPyramid.gov describe a **healthy diet** as one that

- Emphasizes **fruits** (bananas, berries, melons, apples, grapes), **vegetables** (pea pods, carrots are easy to transport) **whole grains** (oatmeal, whole grain breads and crackers), and **fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products** (yogurt, skim or low-fat milk, low-fat cheese sticks);
- Includes **lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts** (almonds, cashews, mixed nuts) and
- Is low in **saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.**

While coffee and tea are OK, avoid drinking them at the end of a shift. Caffeine will make it difficult to sleep.

As tempting as it may be, AVOID high fat and high carbohydrate foods such as donuts, coffee rolls and muffins. Bagels without cream cheese (try peanut butter or almond butter) can be an alternate. Be selective about energy and granola bars – most are loaded with sugar and are high in calories. Kashi Foods makes an excellent granola bar that contain whole grains, no trans fats, good fiber and protein.

A word about energy drinks. Most are very high in sugar (calories) and caffeine along with some herbals. *In reality, most energy drinks contain a combination of mind and body-altering ingredients – stuff like caffeine, taurine, guarana, ginkgo, sugar, vitamins, inositol, carnitine, ginseng and milk thistle. These ingredients affect people differently, depending on their health and any underlying health conditions. For instance, while a healthy guy might feel a slight high after drinking a can, his buddy with high blood pressure might sweat excessively, get the shakes and feel dizzy after the same amount. (www.edrinks.net)*
They should be AVOIDED.

Daily Steps to Health

Don't Smoke. If you do smoke, talk to your medical professional about quitting: they can help you. And, you can also help yourself. For tips on how to quit, go to: You Can Quit Smoking Now.

<http://www.smokefree.gov>. To talk to someone about how to quit, call the National Quitline: 1-800-QUITNOW. For more quit-smoking resources, go to: <http://www.healthfinder.gov/>, and search for "smoking."

Be Physically Active. Walking briskly, mowing the lawn, dancing, swimming, and bicycling are just a few examples of moderate physical activity. If you are not already physically active, start small and work up to 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

Eat a Healthy Diet. Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and eat foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

- Eat breakfast every day. **When you don't eat breakfast, you are likely to make up for the calories you saved by eating more later on in the day. Choose a quick, healthy breakfast option such as yogurt with fruit or toast with sliced banana and a bit of peanut butter. Many people who maintain long-term weight loss eat breakfast daily.**
- Drink water. **Make water more appealing by keeping it cold in the fridge or adding a slice of fruit for flavor. Choosing water keeps you from drinking something else that may be loaded with calories and sugar. People who drink sugar-sweetened beverages tend to consume more calories.**
- Eat smaller food portions. **When eating out, save some of your meal and take it home to make another meal or split one meal between two people. At home, try putting only the amount you want to eat in a small bowl and don't go back for more. People eat more when confronted with larger portion sizes.**

Stay at a Healthy Weight. Balance calories from foods and beverages with calories you burn off with activities. To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation. If you drink alcohol, have no more than two drinks a day. (A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.)

http://www.johnshopkinshealthalerts.com/alerts/nutrition_weight_control/JohnsHopkinsHealthAlertsNutritionWeightControl_306-1.html

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-weight/sleep/index.html>

Sleep

About 15 to 20% of adults in America experience chronic loss of sleep, with the habit of getting less than 6 hours of sleep. Sleep deprived people don't feel as well, don't function as well academically, and get into more accidents than people getting adequate sleep. With sleep deprivation one also experiences impaired memory and learning ability, anxiety symptoms, and lowered immune defenses.

In a 10 year study, persons who got 5 hours or less of sleep were more than twice as likely to develop hypertension as those who got 7 to 8 hours a night. Adults who reported 5 hours of sleep or less were 2.5 times more likely to have diabetes compared with those getting 7 to 8 hours per night. In the

Nurses Health Study, 5 hours of sleep or less was associated with a 45% increase in risk of heart attack.

The direct and indirect costs of sleep deprivation and sleep disorders in this country exceed \$200 billion. This would include about \$50 billion cost in motor vehicle accidents involving tired drivers. In addition, Americans collectively filled over 40 million prescriptions for sleeping medications last year, an increase of 60% over the previous 5 years.

To improve your chances of a good night's sleep, the National Sleep Foundation recommends the following 7 steps:

- 1. Have a regular schedule for going to bed and waking up. Consistency is important. Sleeping in late on weekends can throw off your rhythm.*
- 2. Create a safe environment for sleep. A comfortable mattress and a dark, quiet room are essential. The ambient temperature should be about 60 to 70 deg F, depending upon personal comfort.*
- 3. The bedroom should be a designated sleep area not a work zone. Computers, TV's, and heavy reading material should be banned from the bedroom.*
- 4. Approach bedtime in a relaxed mood. Avoid achievement-oriented tasks, solving challenging conflicts, and lively discussions just prior to bedtime. Develop a regular routine such as light reading, soothing music, or a warm shower or bath to help you relax.*
- 5. Avoid caffeine containing food and beverages. Such stimulants can keep you awake and affect the quality of your sleep.*
- 6. Quit eating 3 to 4 hours before regular bedtime. A big meal late in the evening usually guarantees that you will wake up less refreshed and less rejuvenated the next morning.*
- 7. Exercise or workout regularly. The wise man said that the "sleep of a laboring man is sweet." (Eccl 5:12). The workout should finish long before bedtime to enable one to wind down and prepare for sleep.*

*Excerpts from: **Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle***

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In addition, many people experience sleep apnea where breathing essentially ceases for short periods of time. It is often goes unnoticed in that the effected person doesn't realize the occurrences. Often, a spouse observes heavy snoring followed by periods of apnea. Frequently, one experiencing sleep apnea, feels tired in the morning despite having felt "as if they slept all night." Should anyone be experiencing sleep apnea or be advised that they are heavy snorers – they should consult a medical professional.

Remember – lack of sleep is proven to lower the immune system and make you more susceptible to colds, viruses and flu. Rest when you can! Lack of sleep also makes you prone to accidents and poor judgment (especially during the hours of 2:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.)

You

You are the only one who can take personal responsibility for your health. By taking care of yourself, you take care of others counting on you – whether they be family, friends or citizens.

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