

# Fatigue: a WHS issue

**Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy.**

**It is short- or long-term exhaustion which results in reduced capacity to do things.**

Under WHS laws a person conducting a business or undertaking (e.g. the employer) must ensure the physical and psychological health and safety of workers and other persons.

To do this they must (in consultation with workers and their representatives) eliminate or minimise the risk of, and arising from, fatigue, so far as is reasonably practicable.

## Fatigue can be:



**Physical**



**Mental**



**Emotional**

**or a combination of these**

## Fatigue can be caused by:



**work schedules**, e.g. long or irregular hours, not enough breaks during or between work, or hours that disrupts a person's body clock



**job demands**, e.g. high physical, emotional or mental job demands, or exposure to other psychosocial hazards



**the work environment**, e.g. poor physical work environments, remote or isolated work, or poor work accommodation

## Fatigue can harm workers and other people.

It can harm:



**workers' mental health**, e.g. anxiety, depression



**workers' physical health**, e.g. heart disease, musculoskeletal disorders, diabetes, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal disorders, lower fertility, and



**both workers and other persons when fatigue makes the work less safe**, e.g. where safety depends on workers not making errors such as driving a vehicle.



**safe work australia**



## Long working hours are prevalent in Australia



**12.4%**

of Australian workers work 50 hours or more a week and some work more than 80 hours.<sup>1</sup>



**45-54**

age at which the percentage of workers working more than 50 hours a week peaks, before declining.<sup>1</sup>

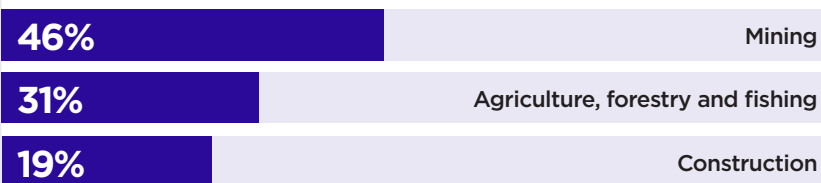
If you work 55 or more hours a week it **increases** your **risk of stroke by 35%** and your **risk of dying from ischemic heart disease by 17%**, compared to working 35-40 hours.<sup>2</sup>

Workers are often exposed to multiple fatigue related hazards. Workers who work long hours are also more likely to be exposed to other hazards such as role overload and emotional demands.<sup>3</sup>

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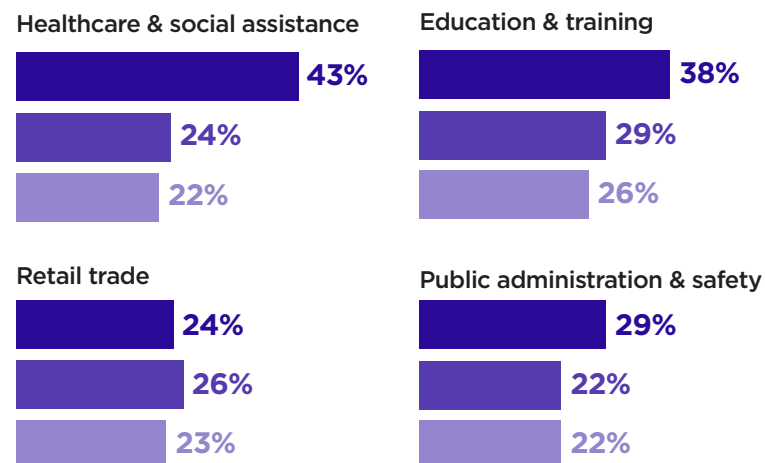
## Industry insights

 **Highest proportion of workers working more than 50 hours per week<sup>1</sup>**



 **Workers likely to say their work is emotionally demanding and they feel physically drained and burnt out<sup>3</sup>**

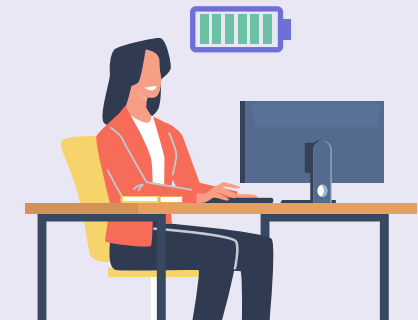
 Emotionally demanding  Physically drained  Burnt out



## Manage the risks of fatigue at work

This may mean redesigning your work, the way you do it or your workplace. For example:

- avoid long hours and redesign work schedules
- provide more breaks
- reduce the physical, emotional and mental job demands, e.g. use equipment to lift objects
- manage psychosocial hazards that increase the risk of fatigue, e.g. exposure to traumatic events or materials, low job control
- ensure workers have the things they need to do their jobs well, safely and on time, e.g. resources, tools, information, support, training
- change the work environment, e.g. improve lighting, reduce noise
- redesign the work to prevent errors, e.g. use IT systems to do calculations and provide reminders, reduce noise so workers don't need to wear PPE, and
- protect workers and others from the consequences of any errors, e.g. double check for mistakes, install barriers to separate others from vehicles.



**Scan the QR code**  
For more information see the model Code of Practice: [Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#) and our [fatigue guidance](#).

### Sources

- <sup>1</sup> ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021  
<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation and International Labour Organisation Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury, 17 September 2021  
<sup>3</sup> People at Work survey data, 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2024