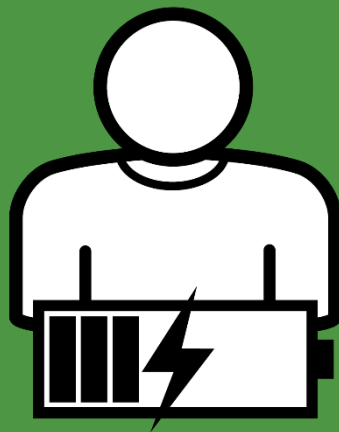


# Fatigue Reduction:

## How to Talk About Fatigue



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## What is a Fatigue Conversation?

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A fatigue conversation is an opportunity to have an open and honest conversation about fatigue. These conversations are a crucial part of caring for one another; Since 1988, fatigue has been a contributing factor in at least 52 fatalities and 612 serious injuries. Discussing fatigue to uncover its root cause is key to reducing the risk of accidents and getting everyone home safe every day.

Fatigue conversations might be ad-hoc chats between colleagues, part of a 1:1, or a topic covered in team meetings or safety hours.

If your manager asks to have a fatigue related conversation with you, it is only because they care for your health and wellbeing and want to ensure you are not putting yourself at unnecessary risk.

Topics that could be discussed are:

- Sleep history – How much, quality, consistency, regular patterns of sleep.
- Work-life balance – Is it actually balanced? Does it cause issues at home or at work?
- Medical conditions – sleep related conditions (Insomnia, sleep apnoea), snoring (both the individual and the person they may share a room with).
- Workload - both planned and actual, interruptions at work that create stress.
- Nature of their workload – Is it reactive or planned? Do they have control over it? Is it too much?
- Shift or working patterns – Are they meeting/exceeding the trigger conditions stated in the fatigue standard?
- How is rest achieved – Hobbies, ability to rest, space and time allowances.
- Diet, hydration and exercise – What is their lifestyle like? Visit the [Fatigue Reduction site](#), or the [Health and Wellbeing hub](#) for more information on the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- Commute to work – Length, time taken, method, time of day.
- Are there other things going on in their life (short or long term) that could affect their levels of fatigue?

At the end of fatigue conversation(s) with their manager, the individual should be aware of:

- What things in their life may be contributing to fatigue in their life
- What their line manager, business area can do to help
- What they can do to help themselves
- Their rights and entitlements
- What their families may be able to do to help
- Barriers that need to be removed

It is important the actions arising from the conversation are carried out, so it is important to record any actions identified during the conversation, agree a follow up date to assess the progress with actions and update on the level of fatigue being experienced. It is good practice for the manager might decide to complete a Fatigue Assessment or put a Fatigue Management Plan together (using the [HMAP form available on Safety Central](#) as a template).

## Fatigue Reduction

A good fatigue conversation will result in the individual knowing that they have the support of their manager, colleagues and the business. These conversations should be held with confidentiality, professionalism, empathy and care, and without fear or judgement.

### When Should a Fatigue Conversation Happen?

Individuals or line managers can initiate the fatigue conversation. Colleagues and friends can also encourage others to initiate fatigue conversations if they believe they may be suffering.

#### **I have a concern about my fatigue**

Ask your line manager for a discussion about how you are feeling.

#### **I have a concern about my employees' fatigue (direct report)**

Ask them for a fatigue conversation. Book a meeting room to have the confidential discussion.

#### **I have a concern about my colleagues/friends' fatigue**

Encourage your colleagues to speak to their manager about their fatigue and how they are feeling. You could share your experiences of having fatigue conversations to help them.

Other times a manager should initiate a fatigue conversation are:

- If any of the standards triggers are likely to, or have been exceeded (in which case, they'll also need to complete a risk assessment and potentially a fatigue management plan)
- If an employee has returned from a long-term absence
- If you are aware that an employee's circumstances have changed which may affect their fatigue levels (i.e. new born baby, carer duties, bereavement etc)

## Best Practice - Active Listening

Prepare yourself in advance of your fatigue conversation. Active listening is a key skill that will help the discussion go well. The aims of active listening are to:

- Build trust and rapport
- Feel and demonstrate concern
- Paraphrase to show understanding
- Avoid judgement, but still provide feedback
- Use non-verbal cues (nodding, eye contact, positive body language)
- Use verbal affirmations (“I see”, “I know”, “I understand”)

By listening “carefully” you can read into what the individual is saying to identify issues.

Words spoken	Maybe indicative of:
“Reduced or no energy” “Physically or mentally exhausted” “Lack of motivation”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are suffering fatigue</li> <li>• Consider the person’s wellbeing</li> <li>• Could be an indicator of other health and wellbeing issues</li> </ul>
“I just cannot get to sleep” “I go to sleep but then wake up an hour later”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedtime routine may need some improvement.</li> <li>• Their household is noisy/busy?</li> <li>• They sit in bed looking at their phone/tablet for hours</li> <li>• They are suffering from Sleep Apnoea or Insomnia</li> <li>• They have dozed on the couch earlier in the evening</li> <li>• They are not achieving effective rest and relaxation</li> </ul>
“I have so many pulls on my time” “I am on the go from the minute I wake to the moment I get to bed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are a carer</li> <li>• They have children</li> <li>• They have a very busy lifestyle</li> </ul>
“I have so much work to do I don’t know what to do first” “I get so many interruptions I am unable to do the day job”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their workload is too much?</li> <li>• What is affecting their ability to plan and prioritise effectively?</li> <li>• They are the ‘go to’ person in the office due to their experience/knowledge/approachability?</li> </ul>
“I have no time for lunch or dinner” “If it was not for coffee, I would not be able to function”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their diet is not conducive to beating fatigue</li> <li>• They may be dehydrated</li> <li>• They are consuming too much coffee or drinking it too late</li> <li>• They are eating far too late which impedes sleep</li> </ul>
“Yes, I am tired, but you just need to get on with it, don’t you?” “I am tired and have made a few mistakes, but my performance is still good” “I can’t go sick, what would the team do without me”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They do not recognise that they could be suffering from fatigue.</li> <li>• They have the desire to push on and work through it.</li> <li>• They have a desire to support the team even at their own health cost.</li> </ul>
“I have not been feeling well of late”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have a medical condition that could be causing fatigue.</li> <li>• Their fatigue may be causing secondary health issues.</li> </ul>
“My partner/family does not help/care. As long as their needs are catered for”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They could have relationship issues at home.</li> <li>• They have not discussed how they feel with their partner/family.</li> <li>• They have or are unable to ask for help at home.</li> </ul>

## Tools for Fatigue Conversations

Here are some tools you may want to take into a fatigue conversation, to provide some guidance.

### RSSB Fatigue Conversation Prompts

Objective	Example Questions or Phrases to use
Show you care about safety / fatigue	Thanks for telling me about this I'm relieved to find out about this I want to spend some time talking with you about your fatigue
Show you care about the individual	I'm sorry to hear that you felt this way How are you feeling now? How are you coping with the hours you currently work? What is making you feel this way?
Find out about the situation when someone has reported a problem	What's happened? Why was that? What happened last night? What happened since your last shift / day at work? When did you? How did you?
Find out about the situation in a proactive conversation	How easy is it to stay alert during this shift? What makes it easier / harder to stay alert during your shift? Tell me more about .... What effect does that have?
Explore solutions together	How could it be changed to help you be more alert? What would help you to get more or better quality of sleep? What would improve that situation? What could you do to overcome that? What can I do to support this?
Manage expectations about changes	These are good suggestions, I will need to take this away and come back to you Realistically it is more likely that we can change (more feasible solutions) than the (less feasible solution) It might take x weeks/months before we can put this measure in place We may need to review this regularly to see how this makes a change / improvement
Reassure them it will be treated confidentially	Just to reassure you, I won't speak to anyone about this who doesn't need to know about it

**Note:** For more information on fatigue documentation produced by the RSSB, please visit [rsb.co.uk/Insights-and-News/Industry-Topics/Fatigue--Alertness](https://rsb.co.uk/Insights-and-News/Industry-Topics/Fatigue--Alertness)

### General fact-finding questions

- Have you felt drowsy, or has the fatigue been more a feeling of weakness?
- During the past month have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?
- Has your fatigue developed gradually or suddenly?
- Does your tiredness come in cycles?
- What are your concerns about the fatigue? What do you think may be the cause?