

# THE INSIDE STORY<sup>®</sup>

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## The Walking Dead

### *What sleep deprivation may be costing your benefit plan*

.....

Researchers estimate that sleep-deprived workers cost us billions of dollars each year worldwide and that almost half of all Canadians go about their daily lives deprived of sleep. Considering that we spend the majority of our daily lives at work, does this mean that the majority of employees are in fact the walking dead?

# The Walking Dead

## Majority of employees – the walking dead?

If this statement is so, what does it mean for your benefit plan? Here is how a sleep-deprived employee compares to a non sleep-deprived employee.

### Decreased...

- Productivity and performance
- Judgment and decision making ability
- Memory and concentration

### Increased...

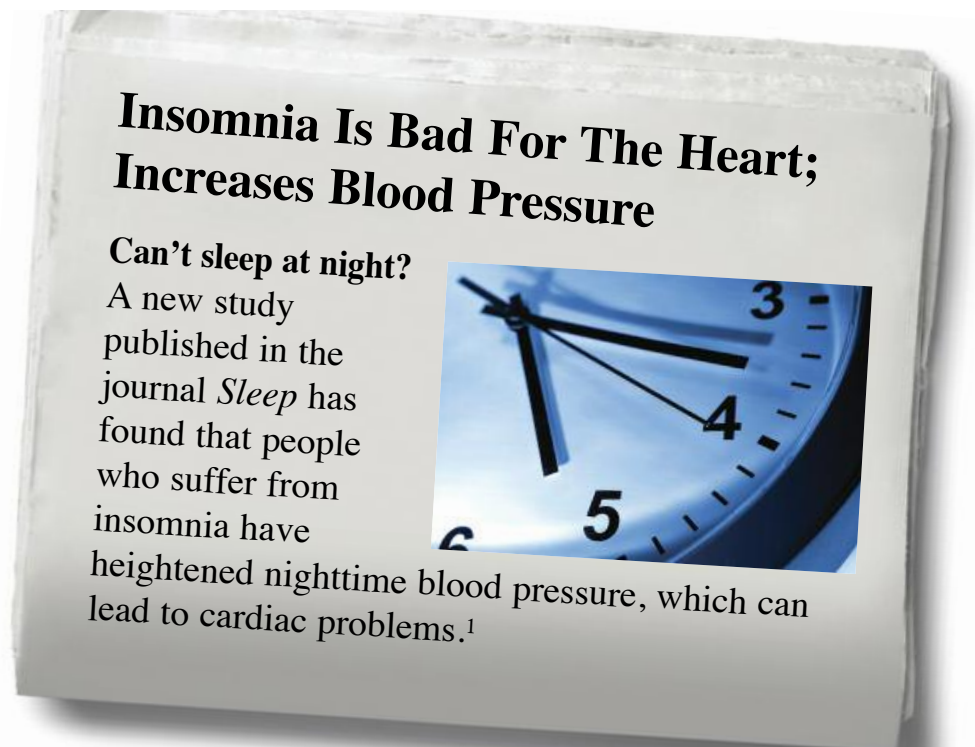
- Sick time, absenteeism and rate of turnover
- Negative moods
- Stress



Not exactly the ideal candidate for *Employee of the Year*. And these are just the short-term characteristics and outcomes—what about in the long term?

## Long-term sleep deprivation is a nightmare for employee health... And your bottom line

Even after just a few days of sleep deprivation, our bodies shift into a kind of 'fast forward aging mode.' Without sleep, we are not letting our bodies repair and recharge and as a result, we age. In the long term, if sleep deprivation continues, we increase the risk of serious health issues—costly issues. While sleep researchers continue to investigate the connection between sleep deprivation and everything from high blood pressure and obesity to heart disease and diabetes, the headlines speak for themselves:



## Poor Sleep May Be Associated With Risk Of Heart Disease



Sleeping less than seven and a half hours per day may be associated with future risk of heart disease. In addition, a combination of little sleep and overnight elevated blood pressure appears to be associated with an increased risk of the disease.<sup>1</sup>

## Sleep May Be Factor In Weight Control

Could sleep be a critical component to maintaining a healthy body weight? According to new research, body mass index (BMI) is linked to length and quality of sleep in a surprisingly consistent fashion.<sup>1</sup>



## Insufficient Sleep May Be Linked To Increased Diabetes Risk



Short sleep times, experienced by many individuals in Westernized societies, may contribute to the development of insulin resistance and reduced glucose tolerance. This in turn may increase the long-term risk of diabetes, according to a new study.<sup>1</sup>

## The cost of insomnia-related work absences and reduced productivity are very high...

A recent study in Quebec concluded that the economic burden of insomnia is very high with the largest proportion attributable to insomnia-related work absences and reduced productivity. In addition, because the economic burden of untreated insomnia is much higher than that of treating insomnia, the study suggests that future research should focus on insomnia therapies. Study highlights include:

- Total annual cost of insomnia in Quebec estimated at \$6.6 billion; includes direct costs associated with insomnia-motivated health care consultations, transportation for these consultations, prescription medications, over-the-counter products, and alcohol used as a sleep aid.

- Annual indirect costs associated with insomnia-related absenteeism were estimated at \$970.6 million, with insomnia-related productivity losses estimated at \$5.0 billion.

- Average annual per-person costs (direct and indirect combined) were \$5,010 for individuals with insomnia syndrome, \$1,431 for individuals presenting with symptoms, and \$421 for good sleepers.

Source: *SLEEP* Volume 32 Issue 1

High blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diabetes, decreased immunity: again, not exactly the ideal candidate for Employee of the Year. And not exactly the best cost/benefit scenario for employee productivity or your benefit plan.

<sup>1</sup> Science Daily [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)

# Zombies need not apply – There is no getting away with less sleep...

Recognizing the importance of sleep is critical—not only for employee health but also in turn for the health of your bottom line. Raising awareness of the importance of sleep to

your employees and supporting them in their efforts to establish good sleep patterns is key to motivating behaviour change. Education and support can make all the difference in transforming employees from the

walking dead to the walking wakeful—the productive, on the job, wakeful. Consider including the following sleep education as part of your employee communications:

## SPOTLIGHT ON SLEEP

### You snooze, you lose? Wrong. Open your eyes to the benefits of closing them...

It's a myth that you can 'catch up' on lost sleep or store sleep for the future, by getting more sleep on weekends. Lost sleep on any specific night has *immediate consequences* for the very next day including:

- Decreased concentration and response time
- Increased stress
- ...and less ability to fight off illness and disease—everything from high blood pressure and obesity to heart disease and diabetes.

The good news is the benefits of getting a good night's sleep are many:

- *Recovery*: blood supply increases during sleep so muscles can recover from the physical stresses of the day.
- *Resistance to infection*: immune system improves allowing us to fight off viral infections better.
- *Retrieval of information*: memory improves because we categorize and reorganize information while we sleep.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SLEEP

### "Oh, what I wouldn't give for a good night's sleep" But what exactly is a 'good night's sleep'?

There is just no getting around it:

- We are human...
- Humans need sleep...
- Sleep is not just a 'nice to have', it is a 'must have'.

As part of the human condition, our 'internal clock' (technically known as circadian rhythm) adapts to 24-hour cycles of light and dark. We are programmed to have one major stretch of sleep every 24 hours in which we cycle through various sleep stages, including initially a 'light sleep' followed by phases of 'deeper sleep'. The key is to allow your body enough time to cycle through the sleep phases at least 4 to 5 times each night. With each cycle lasting about 90 minutes, the ideal 'good night's sleep' is about 8 hours of sleep per night.

# Helping your employees be more *on the job*...

In addition to raising awareness of the importance of sleep, and educating your employees about a good night's sleep, you can also help create an environment that promotes wakefulness, not fatigue:

## At the desk...

■ For office environments, dim lighting and high temperatures make for drowsy workers. Sitting for long periods of time as well as performing repetitive tasks can also lead to drowsiness. Check lighting, temperature, and noise levels, while trying to structure work to have variety. Encourage quick stretch breaks to get the blood flowing again. Depending on the length of work schedules, also consider having a place on site where employees can nap before driving home to help boost energy levels.

## On the shop floor...

■ For manufacturing environments, shiftworkers may try to cope with



staying alert during night shifts (as well as sleeping during the day) by resorting to using food, caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol to 'perk them up' or 'bring them down.' Overuse can lead to negative performance on the job and overall, health problems off the job—ultimately leading to higher health care costs. Encourage shiftworkers to maintain regular

eating and sleeping patterns as much as possible and recommend that they have a comfortable, dark, quiet place to sleep during the day. For additional advice on strategies for structuring shiftwork as well as guidelines to pass along to shiftworkers, [click here](#) to visit the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website.

## NEWS & EVENTS

### Winner of the draw for an iPod shuffle



Congratulations to **Will Fifi**, from Manitoba, the winner of Green Shield Canada's monthly draw for an iPod shuffle. Through this contest, one name will be drawn each month from plan members who have registered for Plan Member Online Services for that month. To learn more, visit [greenshield.ca](http://greenshield.ca)

### More of *The Inside Story*®

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# Everything you ever wanted to know about sleep disorders *but were too tired to ask*

Employee fatigue may be related to a sleep disorder. The problem is that your employees may be in the situation where *they don't know what they don't know*—all they know is that

they are tired. For those who are having sleep issues, a good place to start may be with your Employee Assistance Program because often it takes a professional assessment to

sort out the underlying causes of sleep problems. You could also consider providing them with educational information:

## The A to ZZZs of common sleep disorders...

A sleep disorder may be making you tired. If any of the following sounds like you, contact a health care professional to discuss your symptoms:

<b>Insomnia</b>	■ Combination of difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings and/or waking early
<b>Sleep Apnea</b>	■ Breathing stops sometimes hundreds of times each night
<b>Restless Legs Syndrome</b>	■ Urge to move the legs whenever at rest, interrupting sleep
<b>Narcolepsy</b>	■ Sudden, uncontrollable need to sleep at inappropriate times like talking, eating, driving

Try keeping a 'Sleep Diary' for a couple of weeks before your discussion so you are better able to describe the situation.

### Sleep Diary:

For a couple of weeks, track the following:

- Number of hours of sleep each night
- Time to bed and time up (in the morning or start of next shift)
- Any snoring, gasping for breath, movement
- Feeling tired versus rested each day
- Amount of alcohol, caffeine, cigarettes each day and when consumed throughout the day
- Life events or schedule changes



# WHAT'S NEW

## Administrative policy provides peace of mind

With a growing concern over increasing use of pain medication, we have introduced a Narcotic Pain Medication Policy to help better manage the use of these drugs:

- Pain medications fall into a category of drugs called narcotic analgesics, which are medications used to relieve moderate to severe pain. Narcotic pain medications include codeine, morphine, oxycodone and fentanyl.
- For these drugs, there is a maximum amount plan members

can claim without providing further documentation from their doctor.

- The maximum amount is based on approved prescribing guidelines for the treatment and management of pain.
- As a plan member reaches the maximum claim amount, they must provide us with information to support their pain medication use in order to continue receiving drug plan coverage.

### *What this means...*

- *For you:* peace of mind knowing your drug plan covers only those

drugs that are medically necessary.

- *For your plan members:* ensures that the drugs they are taking to relieve moderate to severe pain fall within appropriate therapeutic guidelines.

While committed to cost control wherever possible for plan sponsors, it is never at the detriment of plan members, ensuring they have access to the appropriate level of health care at all times. For more information, please contact your Green Shield Canada Account Executive or your Plan Advisor.

## Happy Birthday! GSC provider eClaims services turn five

As pioneers in developing provider eClaims services back in 2004, we have continued to enhance our capabilities as we believe that provider eClaims are critical to effective claims management and superior customer service. And in fact, this service delivers a win/win/win situation when you consider the range of benefits for all involved:

- Health Service Providers: "When I signed up, I felt like it put me back in control of my business. I submit my patient's massage therapy claim and he leaves the office happy because he hasn't had to pay anything out-of-pocket or fill out a

claim form. And I have taken advantage of direct deposit, assigning payment directly into my bank account. I know I can wait for a cheque, but direct deposit is much more convenient."

- Plan Members: "I have been going to a physiotherapist for my knee and what I really like is that after each visit, she tells me right on the spot the eligible amount. I know exactly what's covered by my benefit plan and can plan my treatment so it works best for me - without a lot of hassles like looking things up on the Internet, sending in a claim form or phone calls."

- Plan Sponsors: "You can't beat the price—free can only be a good thing—especially when it delivers healthy and happy plan members. If they are healthy and happy, I'm healthy and happy, especially when there is no added impact to our plan cost. I can only see its popularity continuing to grow, why wouldn't it?"

For more about this service, [click here](#) to read our October 2004 bulletin "Provider Online Claim Submission - a first across Canada!"

**GREEN SHIELD**  
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