

# Fatigue Early Warning Signs

## Fact Sheet #3



Fatigue is one of the most common and high-risk challenges in hospitality. Long hours, late finishes, double shifts and unpredictable rostering can significantly impact safety, performance and staff wellbeing.

Understanding the early warning signs helps employers prevent burnout, reduce errors and support a healthier team.

# What is Fatigue?

More than tiredness, fatigue is a state of physical and mental exhaustion that reduces a person's ability to work safely, think clearly and regulate emotions.

# Early Warning Signs of Fatigue

## Physical Signs

- Heavy eyelids or frequent yawning
- Slowed reaction time or clumsiness
- Difficulty keeping eyes open
- Headaches, tension or physical discomfort

## Cognitive Signs

- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased mistakes or forgetfulness
- Poor decision-making
- “Zoning out” or losing track of tasks



## Emotional & Behavioural Signs

- Irritability, frustration or mood swings
- Reduced patience with customers or colleagues
- Withdrawal or quietness
- Feeling overwhelmed easily
- Drop in motivation or engagement

# Why Fatigue Matters in Hospitality

- Increases safety risks during manual handling, service and kitchen work
- Reduces communication and teamwork
- Impacts emotional regulation and customer interactions
- Contributes to burnout and mental ill-health
- Drives turnover and lowers culture



# What Employers & Managers Can Do

## Review Rosters for Fairness

- Avoid excessive doubles and quick turnarounds (“clopens”: when you close and then open the next day)
- Ensure adequate rest between shifts
- high-pressure roles evenly

## Promote Breaks & Recovery

- Ensure staff take meal and rest breaks
- Allow micro-breaks on long or late shifts. Discuss a safe place at work where staff can take breaks
- Provide cool-down time after intense periods

## Encourage Speaking Up

- Normalise reporting fatigue without judgement
- Reinforce that safety comes before speed

## Check-In Regularly

- Ask “How’s your energy today?” or “Feeling sharp enough for this task?”
- Adjust duties if needed

## Provide Staff with Self-Support Tools

- Hydration reminders
- 2-minute breathing resets
- After-shift decompression techniques

# When Fatigue Becomes a Safety Risk

Immediate action is needed when staff:

- Make repeated or unusual mistakes
- Show signs of microsleep
- Are too overwhelmed to continue safely
- Struggle with communication or coordination

## Action Steps for Managers

Use HMM's Roster Fairness Checklist and Staff Check-In Tools to identify fatigue early and support staff appropriately.

### FOR MORE SUPPORT

Download fatigue tools and wellbeing resources from the Healthy Mind Menu Online Hub.

[healthymindmenu.org.au](https://healthymindmenu.org.au)