

# Managing Workplace Fatigue- Sleep and Resilience

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The purpose of this short introduction and the accompanying video is to help occupational therapists develop an understanding of what it means to be resilient, how sleep deprivation affects the mental ability of the brain, the relevance of sleep and resilience to fatigue in the occupational therapy workplace, and to provide sleep and resiliency resources. Furthermore, two relevant research articles will be presented that outline factors causing mental fatigue in healthcare workers, as well as specifically looking at occupational therapists and burnout.

**Resiliency** is defined as the “Ability to adapt to life’s ever-changing landscape and recovery quickly from stressors and potential stressors” (Pipe et al, 2012). Resiliency, or what is often called the ability to “bounce back”, matters because occupational therapists face many stressful, fatigue contributing, events in both their work and personal lives. Piper proposes that to be a resilient person, five factors assist individuals in dealing with challenging situations. Block (see image <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20141105155437-227729731-5-factors-that-promote-resilience>) calls these the 5 ‘Cs’:

- ✓ Connection,
- ✓ Communication,
- ✓ Confidence,
- ✓ Competence & Commitment, and
- ✓ Control.

There are several key resources for building resiliency listed in the Resource section at the end.

**Sleep deprivation** can adversely impact mental health and overall mental performance (Durmer & Dinges, 2005). Firstly, sleep deprivation can increase the risk for anxiety, depression, and aggression. Sleep deprivation also causes a decline in cognitive performance and affects working memory, attention span, planning ability, and concentration (Durmer & Dinges, 2005). All of these contribute to a feeling of fatigue and being overwhelmed at work. Research suggests sleep deficiency in healthcare workers is a major predictor of mental fatigue (Akerstedt et al, 2003). With this data, we can see the correlation between healthy sleep habits and resiliency.

Burnout rates in healthcare professions, attributed to heavier workloads, longer working hours, and limited resources within healthcare institutions, are increasing (Poulsen et al, 2014). With this in mind, we can see the how

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**FACTORS THAT PROMOTE RESILIENCE**

by DR. ALISON BLOCK

[www.dralisonblock.com](http://www.dralisonblock.com)

- 1. CONNECTION**
  - Good relationships with friends and family
  - Involvement in community, cultural, school, charitable or faith-based groups
  - Internalizing a sense of connectedness
- 2. COMMUNICATION**
  - Ability to share, explain, explore, and understand
  - Ability to reframe what has happened
  - Development of insight and good judgment
- 3. CONFIDENCE**
  - Positive yet realistic view of yourself
  - Accurate sense of your abilities
  - Recognition of what you have learned after a problem is resolved
  - Ability to visualize your goals and what you want
  - Believing you can influence how things turn out
- 4. COMPETENCE AND COMMITMENT**
  - Ability to look at the big picture
  - Ability to problem-solve
  - Following through, not giving up
  - Working toward your goals every day
- 5. CONTROL**
  - Managing strong feelings so they enhance relationships and productivity
  - Developing coping skills, not just quick fixes
  - Keeping things in perspective
  - Understand the role that your thoughts play in how you feel

increasingly important improving resiliency is becoming in these professions. Preventative strategies that target burnout while strengthening resiliency are becoming an important consideration for occupational therapists. Poulsen (2014) and colleagues studied 915 occupational therapists to determine factors associated with burnout and discovered that work overload, inability of therapists to distance themselves from work stress, and no time for humor were the main predictors. Interestingly, therapists who worked ten years or less were most likely to experience burnout, compared to more experienced clinicians. It is possible that there is a role for more senior therapists to mentor new comers to the profession in resilience promoting coping strategies.

As a profession, how can occupational therapists become more resilient? To begin, getting a good night sleep is extremely important. Developing a sleep schedule, timing your activities, limiting alcohol and caffeine before bed, and creating an environment with low stimulation may be aspects to assist you in a better night sleep. Furthermore, exercise, proper diet, socialization and relaxation can help you to improve your overall resiliency. It is also important that therapists remember workplace fatigue is a shared responsibility and their employers need to address relevant factors that contribute to decreased sleep and lowered resilience (such as hostile work environments and lack of control over work practice) as well. Working with your Occupational Health & Safety Committee is a good place to start.

#### Resources:

- American Psychological Association-The Road to Resiliency <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>
- Nottinghamshire NHS Health Trust, UK- Invest to Lead Program. Website includes a Resiliency Training Toolkit including a self-assessment, life and work resiliency "wheels" for reflection and other planning tool <http://www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/aboutus/leadership-and-development/invest-to-lead-5/presentations-and-information-packs/march-2014-information-pack/>
- Driver, H. et al (2012) Insomnia in Adults and Children (online book) [http://css-scs.ca/images/brochures/Insomnia\\_Adult\\_Child.pdf](http://css-scs.ca/images/brochures/Insomnia_Adult_Child.pdf) Canadian Sleep Foundation. (see <http://css-scs.ca/menu/education-and-information/brochures> for additional resources).

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