

THE VITAL ROLE OF SLEEP

BEING A SEAFARER IS BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY DEMANDING, REQUIRING REGULAR CONSTANT SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENTS AND DECISION MAKING. THIS APPLIES TO ALL RANKS AND DEPARTMENTS OF CREW, FROM JUNIOR TO SENIOR PERSONNEL. DECISIONS CAN RANGE FROM CAREFULLY PLANNED ACTIONS, SUCH AS STOWAGE ASSESSMENTS AND NAVIGATION, TO QUICK, INSTINCTIVE REACTIONS, LIKE MOVING TO AVOID ONCOMING EQUIPMENT AND AVOID INJURY.

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Teamwork and effective communication are essential for decision making and maintaining safety. However, one crucial aspect that is often overlooked is sleep, which is fundamental to both. When you are overly tired, the likelihood of making poor decisions increases and your physical reaction times slow down, putting safety at greater risk.

Getting enough sleep not only improves your mood but also enhances mental clarity and supports a healthy immune system. Studies also suggest a correlation between sleep deprivation and developing dementia later in life.

So how much sleep is enough? Ideally, adults need between seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep within a 24-hour period. Inadequate sleep can accumulate over time, impacting both a seafarer's mental and physical wellbeing.

So, remember REST:

R - Respect: Respect your colleagues on board during their rest periods. If they are sleeping, try not to disturb them unless it is the time for them to wake up (but there are exceptions explained on the right).

E - Excess: Avoid excessive activities before bedtime, such as screentime or heavy meals. Your goal is to calm the mind and body before sleeping. Eating a large meal can conflict with your body's attempt to power down, as digestion generates energy. Also minimise or avoid caffeine intake, or excessive sugar, when you have a sleep period coming up.

S - Share: If you are feeling extremely tired on a given day, share that with your colleagues. This important knowledge can help colleagues be more aware of how you feel.

IN SEAFARER SAFETY AND WELLBEING

T - Timetable and Teamwork: Everyone on board is a part of the team and it is in the mutual interests of everyone to try and schedule work periods to allow adequate rest. Also, consider the timing of emergency drills and the disruption this may cause to off duty workers.

The Maritime Labour Convention stipulates that rest hours must be at least:

- 10 hours in any 24-hour period
- 77 hours in any 7-day period

There are exceptions for urgent safety matters, like waking the master for an appropriate safety concern. When rest hours are disrupted for exceptional reasons, the effected personnel should be provided with compensatory rest.

A seafarer's sleep period must be within their rest hours, keeping in mind that time is needed for other activities such as eating, washing and other recreation such as exercising. New crew members, especially those dealing with jet lag, should be given time to adjust.

The following can also aid sleep:

- The supply of good quality mattresses and pillows
- Ensuring your cabin is adequately dark during daytime
- Keeping the temperature around 20 Celsius, adjusting for personal preference.

By embracing REST as part of your onboard culture, you will help to create a safer and happier working environment for yourself and your colleagues.