

Accommodation Ideas for Persons with Sleep Disorders

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Questions to Consider When Determining, Implementing, and Maintaining Accommodations

1. What limitations are being experienced by the person with the disability?
2. To what degree do these limitations affect the person and their job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all resources, such as the Job Accommodation Network, being utilized to find or discover possible accommodations?
5. What are the potential workplace hazards and what measures can be taken to correct them?
6. Are regular meetings being held with the person with the disability to evaluate the effectiveness of existing accommodations and to determine if others are needed?
7. Are accommodations being provided to assist the person in dealing with the psychological aspects as well as the physical aspects of their disability?

Most Common Kinds of Sleep Disorders

- Insomnia: A condition which causes difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep for days, weeks, months or years; may have other medical or psychiatric condition present.
- Sleep Apnea: A condition in which a person stops breathing for 30 seconds or more, several hundred times a night. Heavy snoring can signal this condition.
- Narcolepsy: A disorder which causes irresistible sleep attacks, it might include sudden attacks of sleep, excessive daytime sleepiness, muscular weakness, hallucinations and sudden attacks of REM (Rapid Eye Movement - one stage of sleep).
- Restless Legs: A discomfort in the legs which is relieved by moving or syndrome stimulating the legs; might feeling like a tingling, prickling or crawling sensation.

Daytime Symptoms That Might Occur:

- Sleepiness
- Anxiety
- Impaired concentration
- Impaired memory
- Irritability

Accommodations Ideas for Individuals with Sleep Disorders

- Modifying a schedule so the worker does not work shift work, but works consistently on one shift (usually day shift).
- Allow for a flexible schedule so the person can adjust to daily changes. The person may need to have flexibility in the time the individual's workday begins and ends. For example,

- the option of starting between 7 and 10, and working until 3 and 6 (depending on when the day began) could be considered. This may need to be decided daily at the discretion of the worker.
- Allow for a flexible schedule that would allow the worker to take breaks as needed. If the person gets an hour for lunch and two 15-minute breaks, giving the individual the option to take the time throughout the day as needed, might be helpful. An example of this might be, the person may not need the morning breaks, and only a 30-minute lunch but might need an hour later in the afternoon. Or, the individual might need to take several 10-minute breaks during the day and a 30-minute lunch. Some individuals with sleep disorders might need to schedule a time during the day for naps. This might mean a longer workday to allow the individual to make up the time at the end of the day.
 - Flexibility to be able to get up and walk around the work area. If the work does not require the person moving about, then making the work environment flexible so the individual can alternate sitting and standing for some tasks.
 - Possible use of a fan, "driver beep alarm" or other alarm-type device to keep the worker oriented.
 - A checklist, organizer, or pacesetter device with an alarm that rings periodically could also serve as a reminder to the particulars of the task in which the person is presently engaged. One symptom of the sleep disorder might be losing sight of the purpose of a task after it has begun. This accommodation might help the individual to be reminded of what it was that he/she was doing. If the individual has cataplexy (loss of muscle tone, ranging from a slight buckling at the knees to a complete "rag doll" limpness throughout the body - might happen if person has narcolepsy), safety issues related to the immediate work area might need to be addressed. Not everyone who has narcolepsy experiences this symptom. If they do, it is usually associated with the expression of a strong emotion. If the worker is aware this might happen, steps might be taken to address safety needs in case the situation arises.

Accommodations Examples

(Taken from actual cases reported to JAN, search was done by Corey Turner, Graduate Assistant)

- A customer service representative has sleep disorder. The person has problem staying alert while speaking on the telephone. The employer purchased a "beep" alert. Also, employer allowed the employee to take more frequent breaks. The accommodation cost \$12 and was very successful.
- A social worker, who has narcolepsy, was having problems getting to work on time due to getting sleepy while driving. The employer adjusted time for later access to work, allowing time for the medicine that she took in the morning to take affect. The accommodation cost \$0 and was very successful.
- A switchboard operator with narcolepsy reported using a "beep" alert on the job. This device is worn behind the ear and when the head nods down (as it might when the person falls asleep) a gentle alarm sounds which wakes the individual.
- A telephone repairman with sleep apnea, was having difficulty staying alert on the job. The employer provided a CPAP Machine for the employee to use and it was successful in keeping him alert. The cost was unknown.
- A professional in a management position, with narcolepsy, was provided time in the workday to schedule naps. A place was provided in the worker's office so that they could get the rest needed at certain times during the day. The person still performed the duties to the standard of the employer, but with periodic breaks in the day.
- A public contact representative, who has sleep apnea, would fall asleep on the job. The employer provided additional breaks for the employee and education on sleep disorder to the co-workers so that they would understand the disability better. The accommodation was successful and the cost was \$0.

- An employee, whose position included clerical and technical tasks, has narcolepsy. The identified problematic areas were: on the job fatigue, falling asleep at desk and in meetings, and difficulty awakening in the morning. The accommodations that were implemented were: flexible break opportunities on the job enabling sleep breaks, identified location where employee could comfortably and discreetly rest during scheduled breaks, modified work assignments, ability to get up from desk and perform a variety of tasks in order to break monotony. All the accommodations were successful and the cost was \$0.
- An employee of a telephone service company has narcolepsy. The accommodation that was implemented was a flexible schedule. The individual was given a total of 1 and 1/2 hours of break time per day (two 15-minute breaks and 1 hour lunch). The worker is allowed to divide that time as needed on a daily basis. The job duties include answering a multi-line phone system, taking messages, transferring calls and answering questions. The workstations of several workers were rearranged, thereby providing more of a visual barrier among the workstations. This gave all workers more privacy needed to perform the job without distractions.

Note:

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