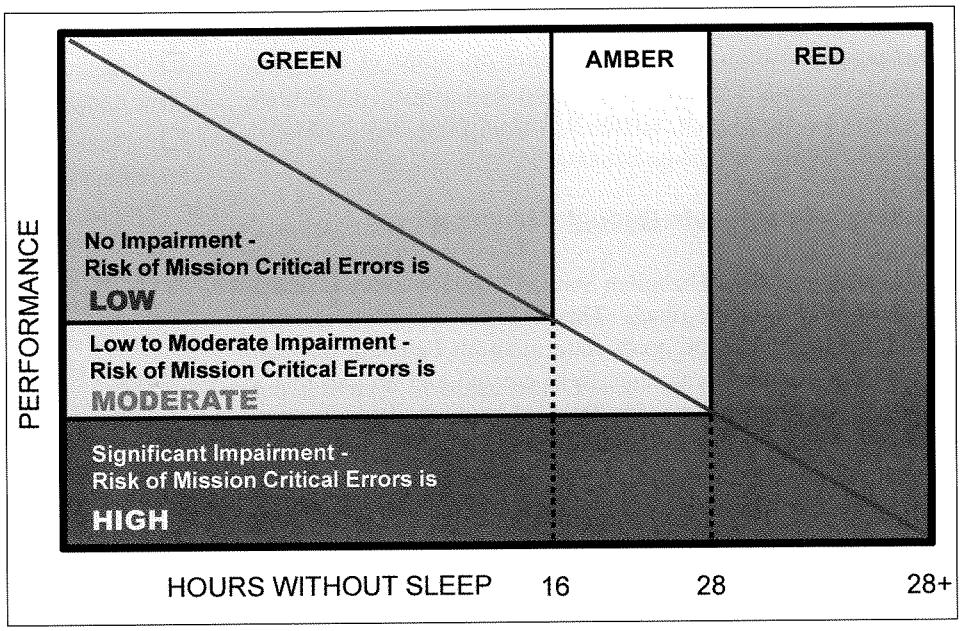
SLEEP MANAGEMENT AND SOLDIER READINESS:

A Guide for Leaders and Soldiers

CAPTAIN JUSTIN CURRY



Like food, water, and air — sleep is a necessity. When Soldiers don't get enough sleep, performance suffers and everyone is put at risk. The effects of sleep deprivation sneak up on us. When Soldiers don't get enough sleep, the ability to judge the impact that sleep deprivation has on their abilities is diminished and performance decreases. Sleep deprivations may lead to:

☐ Falling asleep at the wheel causing a vehicle roll-over;

☐ Administering the wrong medicine or the wrong dose;

☐ Failing to recognize a threat or reacting too slowly to it; or

☐ Transposing digits while entering coordinates into a fire-control system.

A sleep deprived Soldier may make bad tactical decisions. The bottom line is that sleep deprivation can get Soldiers killed!

Sleep Deprivation and Performance

The longer Soldiers go without sleep, the poorer their performance on any number of tasks. In general, a person can sustain normal performance without noticeable impairment for about 16 hours after waking up. After 16 hours without sleep, there is a noticeable decrease in performance. After being awake for 24 hours, the reaction time is worse than being legally intoxicated. After 28 hours without sleep, performance becomes significantly impaired with the likelihood of critical errors rising to an unacceptable level.

Sleep Management

To sustain performance over the long haul, Soldiers need at least six and preferably seven to eight hours of sleep out of every 24. Soldier performance will degrade over time with less sleep than six hours. Getting four to six hours of sleep every 24 hours will keep Soldiers in the Amber zone (where the risk for mission critical errors is increased but still at acceptable levels) for periods of up to several weeks. Getting less than four hours of sleep will keep Soldiers in the Red Zone (where the risk for mission critical errors is unacceptably high).

Sleep doesn't have to be continuous. It is preferred that Soldiers have uninterrupted sleep time; however, several shorter sleep periods that add up to six to eight hours will likely be adequate.

Tips for Sleep Management

Tips for Soldiers:

✓ Don't sleep in areas where there is regular activity.

✓ When sleeping, minimize exposure to noise and light — wear ear plugs and use blackout shades.

✓ Avoid over-the-counter "sleep aids," which cause grogginess not actual sleep.

✓ Sleep whenever possible — even a little sleep is better than none. Several "catnaps" can add up quickly.

Tips for Leaders:

☐ Develop a unit sleep management program that gives Soldiers at least six and preferably seven to eight hours to sleep out of every 24.

☐ Soldiers trying to sleep during the day require longer (or more frequent) opportunities to sleep to compensate for the body's normal reaction to sleep cycle disruption.

☐ Never put Soldiers in a position where they must choose between sleep and something else they would enjoy.

☐ Arrange sleep schedules that give Soldiers opportunities to sleep at a consistent time.

If Sleep Loss Can't be Avoided:

✓ Use caffeine – drink the equivalent of two cups of coffee (~200 mg of caffeine) every two to four hours. Caffeine use as described above will help maintain performance even in the face of moderate sleep loss.

✓ Remember … sleep is a necessity.

✓ Your performance begins to suffer as soon as you start losing sleep.

✓ If you are struggling to stay awake, then your ability to function is already impaired.

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