

# IMSAFE

## Illness, Medication, Stress, Alcohol/Drugs, Fatigue, Emotion

**Illness** - We all get sick from time to time. Having a cold while working will not only be uncomfortable, but can be distracting and potentially dangerous. For example, if you have a sinus infection you may have difficulty breathing in an SCBA; if you have a crushing sinus headache you may be unable to do rapid drug calculations in your head.

**Medication** - Some forms of medication come with side effects that may impact your mental cognition. Medications that cause: fatigue, unusual weakness, nausea, dizziness, headaches and other symptoms that cause impairment can be dangerous while operating vehicles, fighting fires or treating patients. You cannot take care of someone else's emergency if you're senses are so dulled by medication you cannot effectively manage a scene or manage yourself.

**Stress** - There are two types of stress; acute and chronic. Acute stress refers to something that causes stress for a short amount of time. This could be caused by an upcoming test, being stuck in a traffic jam, or a scheduled review with your medical director. Chronic stress is a type of stress that exists for a prolonged period of time due to an extreme emotional pressure or traumatic incident. Acute stress generally isn't cause for major concern when working (but should still be taken into account by yourself and your crewmates). Chronic stress raises larger concerns, and can severely impact your ability to work safely. When deciding if you should work – or take on significant high acuity tasks during a shift – be sure to identify the type of stress you are experiencing, the cause, your coping ability and if it will impact your ability to bring your A game.

**Alcohol** - We all know you can't work while under the influence of alcohol. But how long ago was your last drink? Pilots say "8 hours from bottle to throttle", which might be sufficient for one or two beers but isn't for five cocktails. A "big" 4-day with alcohol and/or recreational drugs may impair your ability to think critically during your shift long after it has physically left your body.

**Fatigue** - Fatigue is a human factor that is the catalyst for many accidents in emergency services. Employees may experience fatigue after sleep loss, exercise, physical work, or prolonged stress. When experiencing fatigue, performance will decrease rapidly and can lead to: loss of concentration, impaired coordination, and decreased ability to communicate. Fatigue is endemic in emergency services but must be acknowledged and – to the extent possible – mitigated.

**Emotions** - Emotion is a rather hard topic for a go/no-go decision. In some cases, work can be a good outlet to help remove negative feelings. However, when experiencing severe negative emotions such as anger, depression, or impatience that could interfere, analyze your ability to work carefully. Analyzing your emotions can be difficult, but is an important part of a prework personal checklist to make sure you are healthy and comfortable enough to care for the public.

## Questions to ask yourself:

Have you completed the IMSAFE checklist?

Are you sick or feeling under the weather?

Are you on any medication that causes impairment and could interfere with work?

Are you under any stress or experiencing anxiety that could negatively impact your ability to work?

Have you consumed alcohol in the past 8 hours? Are you hungover?

Are you well rested? Are you too tired to function?

Are you feeling angry or upset? Are you emotionally competent?