

Sleep Deprivation

Category: Fatigue

written by Joan Greland-Goldstein | September 1, 2020

Jeez, I'm tired! Hope I make it home without falling asleep! Okay, windows wide open, radio blasting. Here we go.

I had just finished working the 11 p.m.-to-7 a.m. shift at a hospital in Burbank, California. Now I was facing an hour's drive home. Because I was afraid of falling asleep at the wheel, I always kept my right hand at the twelve o'clock position. That way, if I nodded off, my hand would relax, fall off the wheel, and awaken me. I was thankful the freeway congestion kept my speed slow.

Making it home without incident, I walked in to find both my sons awake.

"I'm hungry, Mama," was Andy's greeting. Chris was gurgling in his crib, talking to his mobile.

I made Andy a bowl of cereal and immediately went to feed Chris, since my breasts were engorged and sore.

By the time Chris had finished nursing, my husband was stumbling into the kitchen for coffee.

"How was your night?" I asked him.

"Not good," he said. "Chris woke up at least five times and didn't want the bottle. Finally he took a little and fell asleep around 5:00. Andy was up a couple of times, too, worried about dragons under his bed. This just isn't working!"

"We just have to keep trying," I responded. "We need the money."

Retreating to the bedroom, I fell asleep immediately, despite the bright room and noise in the rest of the house.

Three hours later, Chris's crying woke me. When I got up to feed him, Andy took the opportunity to join me and bounce on the bed.

"Please, honey, entertain Andy—I need to get more sleep." They went into the living room to read a book.

Two hours later, Andy's crying woke me.

"What is it now?" I asked irritably.

"I told him we couldn't play outside until Chris woke up. He's not happy with that answer."

"I'm up now. I'll take him out to play."

After preparing dinner and getting everyone fed, I turned baths and bedtime over to my husband and took a brief nap before heading to work and doing it all over again.

We lived through this routine every weekend for the next ten months—it was hell! Richard was always groggy when he went to work on Monday morning, and I spent the whole week trying to recuperate. As Chris got older, it became a little easier. But the anxiety about falling asleep at the wheel never abated, though I never had an accident.

The never-ending fatigue finally made the situation untenable, and I resigned. My husband and I were both grateful when I found another part-time job on the evening shift at a hospital a mile from our house, and life returned to a semblance of normal.

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