



The Science of Training

with [David Blake](#)

How you can get more and better sleep off duty

There is no shortage of proof that police officers are working fatigued — evidenced by the sometimes fatal errors that occur as a result

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Co-authored with Richard Shane, Ph.D.

During your next tour, will you erroneously cause someone's death due to a lack of sleep? This question — inflammatory as it may be — is pertinent, and based on a depth of scientific evidence on the negative effects of fatigue.

The problem spans decades and is formally recognized in several career fields — pilots and long-haul truck drivers, for example — who have created specific rules and working conditions in response.

Unfortunately, law enforcement continues to be slow in responding to the science pointed directly at the field since the 1990s.

A History of Trouble

There is no shortage of proof that police officers are working fatigued — evidenced by the sometimes fatal errors that occur as a result.

Some studies have shown 40 percent of police officers suffer from at least one sleep disorder and most aren't even aware of the disorder (Shantha M. W. Rajaratnam, et al., 2011). While this staggering statistic provides proof many officers lack appropriate sleep, other empirical evidence is even more alarming.

Officers in another large study overwhelmingly reported that they routinely feel fatigued, drive while “drowsy,” and even have [fallen asleep while driving](#). A recent study involving 277 officers showed that 69 percent of those studied committed [fatigue-related error while working](#).

The bottom line is that a lack of sleep results in higher rates of accidents and injuries — impaired thinking, reaction time deficiencies; increased health problems and costs, pain, stress, anxiety, depression, irritability; and impaired personal relationships.

A [recent study](#) has even shown that moderate levels of fatigue have a significant effect on an officer’s ability to react and make correct decisions in shoot / don’t shoot situations.

A Solution Exists

Here’s the good news: Getting good sleep is one change that can have a positive effect on all the areas mentioned above. While many organizations are not addressing the issue of fatigue, you can do so personally.

But too often, the ways in which people have attempted to achieve better sleep are unsuccessful. Do any of these techniques sound familiar?

- Relax your entire body
- Deep breathing
- Try to quiet your mind

Do you remember trying these techniques as you lay in bed staring at the ceiling and becoming all the more frustrated — actually increasing stress and the probability you won’t fall asleep anytime soon?

But there is a method that relieves stress and allows you to ease into sleep. It may sound unusual, but your tongue is a central switch in your nervous system. Stress causes most people to press their tongue against the roofs of their mouths. Periodically be aware of your tongue, both during the day and at bedtime. If you find your tongue tense, allow it to be just a little softer. It can rest anywhere in your mouth, even lightly touching the roof of your mouth — just not pressing.

Allowing your tongue to be slightly calmer can help calm your mind, emotions and body, helping you ease toward sleep.

When your mind and emotions are active, there’s usually tension in your body. Instead of trying to calm your mind and emotions, gently be aware of any body tension without trying to make it change. Gently being aware of the body sensation helps it gradually begin to become softer and looser by itself.

You then feel calmness deep in your body and can begin to rest in it, like resting a soft pillow inside you. Your mind and emotions enjoy that feeling and become calmer without trying. Your body knows this feeling and continues easing toward sleep.

These are just introductory steps to the Sleep Easily Method. You can learn more by checking out the Sleep Well video here www.sleepeasily.com/police. It will guide you through a brief exercise that gives

you a simple way to calm your mind, emotions and body, leading to sleep. You can also obtain a free SleepGuide book download, which has lots of resources to help you sleep.

The book includes a simple and effective way to relieve tension and trauma. The book also gives you information about sleeping in the midst of shift work, sleeping in noisy environments, lifestyle changes to support good sleep, how to safely and comfortably reduce and eliminate the need for sleep medication, and much more.

About the Authors

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David Blake is a retired California peace officer and certified Ca-POST instructor in DT, firearms, force options simulator and reality-based training. His experience includes SWAT, force option unit, field training, gangs/narcotics and patrol. He is a certified Force Science Analyst and teaches the Ca-POST certified courses entitled Force Encounters Analysis and Human Factors: Threat & Error Management for the California Training Institute. He also facilitates the Ca-POST Force Options Simulator training to tenured officers from multiple jurisdictions. Dave is an expert witness/consultant in human performance and use of force.

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