

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-105917](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Fatigue caused by inadequate sleep can negatively affect a service member's performance and has contributed to accidents resulting in deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to ships, vehicles, and aircraft. DOD recognizes that impairment from fatigue can be equivalent to the effects of alcohol intoxication and significantly increases the risk of physical injury.

House Report 117-118, which accompanied a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, includes a provision for GAO to review DOD's efforts to limit sleep deprivation and manage fatigue across the military services. Among other things, this report assesses the extent to which (1) service members are getting adequate sleep and (2) DOD has addressed and managed service member fatigue.

GAO analyzed fatigue-related policies and guidance; interviewed cognizant officials; and surveyed service members from selected occupations, including pilots, aviation maintenance personnel, missileers, and motor vehicle operators.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations, including that DOD conducts an assessment of its fatigue-related oversight structure, assigns DOD leadership, and creates and maintains a list of all fatigue-related research projects, and that the military services assign fatigue-related leadership. DOD generally concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-105917](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or MaurerD@gao.gov.

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MILITARY READINESS

Comprehensive Approach Needed to Address Service Member Fatigue and Manage Related Efforts

What GAO Found

Many service members are not getting the Department of Defense (DOD) recommended 7 or more hours of sleep each day. The department's overarching fatigue-related guidance emphasizes service members obtain at least 7 hours of sleep for optimal performance and readiness. For over a decade, DOD surveys have found that the majority of service members report sleeping 6 or fewer hours per night. Respondents to GAO's nongeneralizable survey cited similar issues. For example, many respondents are sleeping too little, and roughly half of respondents have poor sleep quality regardless of quantity. Survey respondents provided examples of how sleep deprivation has affected their work, from nearly colliding with another aircraft to falling asleep on the job.

Service Members on How Sleep Deprivation Has Affected Their Work

"Slow reaction time. Almost collided with another aircraft due to mental fatigue."

— Remotely piloted aircraft pilot

"Sometimes when I'm driving, I find myself falling asleep and I have to catch myself. I could kill someone on accident because I'm not getting the right sleep."

— Motor vehicle operator

"Slower response and processing times. Leads to greater possibility of mistakes made while sleep deprived."

— Aviation maintainer

Source: GAO survey responses. | GAO-24-105917

DOD and the services have taken steps to address fatigue-related issues, such as developing guidance on fatigue management, but DOD faces oversight and enterprise-wide collaboration challenges in managing fatigue.

- **Oversight structure limitations.** DOD has not identified and delegated sufficient oversight authority at the department level, and the military services have not assigned leadership to oversee service-level efforts. Without an assessment of DOD's oversight structure and assigning DOD and service-level leadership, DOD will be hindered in its efforts to limit and manage fatigue across the department.
- **Fragmented fatigue-related research.** GAO identified nearly 130 fatigue-related research projects the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force conducted from 2017 to 2023. Forty-eight of these projects studied the use of wearable devices to track sleep data among other uses, with many of them using the same type of technology or even the same model. Establishing a list of all fatigue-related research will help DOD gain visibility and reduce any fragmentation that may exist, potentially leading to cost savings.

Wearable Device Use Across Services for Fatigue-Related Research, 2017—2023

	Smart watches	Dedicated sleep/activity/health trackers	Smart rings	Headgear	Heart monitors
Army	●	●	●	●	●
Navy	●	●	●	●	●
Marine Corps	●	●	●	●	●
Air Force	●	●	●	●	●

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Macrovector/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-24-105917