

To combat Japan's karoshi, some firms allow tired workers to nap on the job

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- **The Japanese phenomenon of karoshi means death brought on by extreme sleep deprivation.**
- **Not getting enough sleep can trigger a range of health issues, including high blood pressure, stroke, and depression.**
- **A recently published government paper warns that teachers and medical staff are at particular risk of karoshi.**

Sleeping on the job might be frowned upon in most parts of the world, but it's become part of office life for many workers in Japan.

In a country famed for its culture of long working hours, sacrificing one's personal needs for the good of the company has long been seen as a sign of loyalty and commitment.

It has led to the phenomenon of karoshi – death brought on by extreme sleep deprivation. But now, many Japanese firms are taking steps to change the nation's relationship with work and sleep.

Tokyo-based wedding organizer, Crazy, has started rewarding staff who get a minimum of six hours of sleep per night. And an IT services company called Nextbeat is reported to have had [bespoke napping rooms installed](#) for its staff.

Tackling karoshi through naps at work

Not getting enough sleep can trigger a range of health issues, including high blood pressure, stroke, and depression. At its most extreme, sleep deprivation can lead to confusion, lack of cognitive functions, and ultimately death. It has even been used as a [torture technique](#).

In 2013, 31-year-old journalist Miwa Sado [died of congestive heart failure](#) not long after working 159 hours of overtime in one month, with only two days off throughout. Tadaaki Igari, a 57-year-old mechanic working at the Fukushima nuclear plant, [died in 2017](#) of a fatal arrhythmia (an abnormal heartbeat). He too had worked prodigious amounts of overtime, logging 100 hours in the month before his death. A recently published government paper warns that teachers and medical staff are at particular risk of karoshi.

But for the employees of Crazy in Tokyo, no such fears await. “You have to protect workers’ rights, otherwise the country itself will weaken,” the firm’s CEO, [Kazuhiko Moriyama told Bloomberg](#). His attitude reflects a growing Japanese trend to give health and wellbeing a higher priority.

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- [Do we really need eight hours of uninterrupted sleep a night?](#)
- [Feeling sleepy in the office? This Japanese technology detects tired workers and blasts cold air into the room](#)

The Japanese health ministry is issuing guidance for employers to help eradicate what it calls the “sleep is expendable” attitude, and point out to businesses the importance of sleep and the benefits of a well-rested workforce. Meanwhile, the Japanese Society of Sleep Research has warned that 71% of adult males in Japan routinely get less than seven hours of sleep each night, making them extremely prone to karoshi. More worryingly, 30% of

Japanese adults now rely on alcohol to fall asleep – a situation that could easily be the cause of yet more health problems in the future.

For businesses used to a culture of extracting as much value from their staff as possible, there are some very good reasons to change their ways and encourage workers to take better care of themselves. A 2009 study by Rand attempted to quantify the cost of sleep deprivation. Ill health and higher mortality rates were all blamed for an estimated \$138 billion a year productivity loss to the Japanese economy – worth 2.92% of GDP.