Maritime Health and Lifestyle — study guide

Life at sea puts a seafarer's health under pressure — long hours, poor food, little exercise and separation from family. This guide covers the protections in law and the habits that protect health.[1][2]

Your working protections

To reduce the risk of injury or death, report anything suspicious to the senior officer, conduct a risk assessment before any work begins, never undertake work without training, and never take shortcuts. To limit the risk of unpaid wages, ensure all outstanding salary is paid before leaving the ship, do not accept the suggestion that the money will be safer with the shipowner, and conduct thorough research before joining a ship or working for a new owner.

The Maritime Labour Convention

Under Title 2 of the Maritime Labour Convention, each ship should have a sufficient manning level, and promotion and the development of skills should be available for every seafarer. The minimum age of employment for a seafarer working in hazardous conditions is **18**. Seafarers must be given at least **10 hours of rest in any 24-hour period** and at least **77 hours in any 7-day period**.

Physical and mental health

Seafarers have an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease because they are more likely to have unhealthy diets, lack the space to perform proper exercise, and work in a stressful environment for long periods. Factors that can harm mental health include loneliness, fatigue and lack of communication. A seafarer can reduce the chances of physical or mental health problems by exercising more frequently, stopping or moderating smoking and drinking, and keeping in touch with family and friends.

Scale of the industry

The shipping industry provides work to about **1.5 million seafarers** worldwide. The majority of fatal accidents at sea are related to weather conditions and, above all, **human error**.

Key facts to remember

- Injury prevention: report concerns, risk-assess first, never work untrained, never take shortcuts.
- Unpaid wages: get salary before leaving, refuse "the shipowner will hold it", research the owner first.
- MLC Title 2: sufficient manning; promotion and skills development. Minimum age for hazardous work: 18.

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- Rest: ≥10 hours in 24; ≥77 hours in 7 days.
- Cardiovascular risk: poor diet, no exercise space, long-term stress.
- Mental health risks: loneliness, fatigue, lack of communication. Counter with exercise, less smoking/drinking, contact with family.
- ~1.5 million seafarers; most fatal accidents involve weather and human error.

Sources

1. Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended) — Title 2 (conditions of employment, hours of rest, minimum age and manning).
2. STCW Convention and Code — fitness for duty, training and competence.