

Your rights at work

Easy · 15 min to read · Free

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Your pay stubs
- ☐ Your offer letter and any employee handbook
- ☐ Your own record of hours: dates, start and end times, breaks

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Minimum wage: the federal minimum is \$7.25 an hour.** Many states set a higher one, and when both apply you get the higher rate.
- 2 **Overtime: covered nonexempt employees get at least one and a half times their regular rate for hours over 40 in a workweek.** Your workweek is a fixed seven-day period, and hours can't be averaged across two weeks.
- 3 **Weekends and nights: federal law doesn't require extra pay for weekend or night work, or double time.** That's up to your employer or your contract.
- 4 **Breaks: federal law doesn't require lunch or coffee breaks.** But if your employer gives short breaks of about 5 to 20 minutes, they count as paid work time.
- 5 **Safety: your employer must keep the workplace free from known hazards, train you in a language you understand, give you safe machines and required safety gear like gloves or a harness, and protect you from toxic chemicals.** You can report an injury and get copies of your medical records.
- 6 **Speaking up: you can report safety concerns without being punished.** If you can, tell your employer first; they may fix it quickly.
- 7 **Discrimination: federal laws prohibit firing and other job discrimination based on age, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability and veteran status.** To file a charge with the EEOC, start at the EEOC Public Portal or call 1-800-669-4000.
- 8 **Keep your own record of hours.** Employers must keep time and pay records, but your notes and pay stubs are your evidence if there's a dispute.

Watch out Deadlines are short. An OSHA whistleblower complaint is due within 30 days of the retaliation. OSHA can't issue violations for safety incidents more than six months old. An EEOC charge is due within 180 calendar days, extended to 300 if a state or local agency enforces a similar law.

DAD NOTE Write down your hours yourself. The person who keeps the records wins the argument.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/work/your-first-weeks-on-the-job/your-rights-at-work/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: U.S. Department of Labor; Occupational Safety and Health Administration; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.