

SLEEP ADVICE FOR SHIFT WORKERS

Shift work is prevalent across a range of industries and can take the form of permanent night shifts, rotating shifts, split shifts or overtime/on call. Sleep disruption and deprivation are primary factors resulting from shift work, but it can affect other lifestyle factors too, such as eating and exercise.

Sleep deprivation affects our reaction times and judgement and causes poor concentration, thinking, memory, increased irritability and hostility. Long-term sleep deprivation has far more serious consequences: it's been linked to several serious health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Prolonged sleeplessness leads to hallucinations and sensory dysfunction. Noises become louder, vision is affected, and sufferers start to isolate themselves.

- Make sure the sleeping environment is as conducive to rest as possible. It needs to be cool, quiet, dark and make sure you're sleeping on a comfortable bed. Invest in black out curtains or blinds to block out light and if needs be, use an eye mask too. Use ear plugs to muffle external noise and talk to your partner, family or housemates about keeping any internal noise to a minimum.
- When it's time to wake up you need light – special lamps which start with low level light and gradually get brighter help to speed up the biological clock once more and are a more pleasant way to wake up than with the shocking intrusion of an alarm clock!
- Consider what you're eating and drinking. Try not to rely on caffeinated drinks to keep you awake during the night as it will make it more difficult to fall asleep later, and if possible, avoid caffeine consumption five to six hours before going to sleep. Swap a large, heavy meal for a something lighter and resist the temptation to eat fatty, processed foods. If you can't easily access healthy food at work, plan in advance so that you can take it with you.
- Use the weekend or days off to get in some extra 'recovery' sleep.
- It's still important to wind down properly before sleep no matter what time you go to bed. Rather than using electronic devices, try yoga, meditation or reading. There are also breathing exercises that can be practised which are great for relaxing and reducing stress levels.
- Consider using public transport or taxis after working a night shift. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) recognises that drivers who work shifts as being a high-risk group for fatigue related car accidents, especially at the end of a night shift or a long shift. If you must drive, you may find exercising briefly before your journey helps you to feel more alert. Delay your journey and have a power nap if you feel sleepy.



- If possible wear sunglasses on the way home from work—daylight will encourage your brain to feel awake and reduce your chance of getting good quality sleep. Be cautious of wearing sunglasses however if you are driving!
- Napping should be well supervised and only be used as a strategy in organisations where there is a high risk of involuntary sleeping, such as driving and night-time vigilance tasks. Napping should not be adopted in work environments where important decisions, especially safety-critical decisions, could be clouded by sleepiness. If napping is adopted, appropriate facilities should be provided with scheduled breaks of ideally around 40 minutes to allow workers sufficient time to have a short nap, refresh themselves and regain alertness before resuming work. A short afternoon or evening nap of around 90 minutes at home before a night shift however can be helpful in boosting energy levels especially if you're transitioning from a day to a night shift.
- After your final night, aim for a short morning nap (1-2 hours), ideally before midday then get up and try to keep to as 'normal' day as possible. You should try to eat at your normal eating times and exercise as usual aiming for as normal a bedtime as possible. You're likely to need two 'normal' nights to re-establish a usual sleep pattern.
- Sharing a bed can be a challenge when you have clashing sleep schedules. Ask your partner to get dressed in another room so they don't disturb you when dressing for the next day and if you stir when their alarm goes off, ask them not to engage with you so you can roll over and go back to sleep.
- Put a do not disturb sign on your front door and remember to put your mobile phone on silent so you're not disturbed during the day.

For more information, contact The Sleep Charity or your representative.

For more information and advice, visit The Sleep Charity at thesleepcharity.org.uk or contact us on info@thesleepcharity.org.uk