

General Tips to Improve Health and Wellbeing if you are a Night Shift Worker

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| <p>Driving to and from work can be risky, particularly after a long shift, a night shift or before an early start. The tips listed opposite may make driving safer</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using public transport or taxis rather than driving; • Exercise briefly before your journey • Share driving if possible • Drive carefully and defensively • Try not to hurry • Stop if you feel sleepy and take a short nap if it is safe to do so • Make occasional use of caffeine or energy drinks |
| <p>Suitable sleep schedule</p> <p>Most adults need 7 – 8 hours sleep a day, although this decreases with age. If you cannot do this try to rest as this is still beneficial. Recording sleep patterns and problems using a diary may help to explain fatigue and tiredness. It can also be used to help find the most suitable strategies and conditions for a better quality of sleep</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you work shifts try going to bed at different times e.g. soon after you arrive back from work or stay up and sleep before the next shift; • Have a short sleep before your first night shift; • If coming off night shifts have a short sleep and go to bed earlier that night; • Once you have identified a suitable sleep schedule try to keep to it |
| <p>Promoting sleep</p> <p>To promote sleeping try to follow a similar routine to the one you follow before a normal nights sleep. The following tips may help you to relax after a shift and promote sleep</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go for a short walk, relax with a book, listen to music and/or take a warm bath before going to bed; • Avoid vigorous exercise before going to sleep as it is stimulating and raises the body temperature; • Avoid caffeine, energy drinks and other stimulants a few hours before bedtime as they can stop you going to sleep; • Avoid alcohol as it lowers the quality of sleep |
| <p>Diet</p> <p>It is very important to consider the timing and quality of your meals.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular light meals/snacks are less likely to affect alertness or cause drowsiness than a single heavy meal; • Choose foods that are easy to digest such as pasta, rice, bread, |

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| <p>Digestive problems are common in shift workers due to the disruption of the internal body clock and poor diet. Plan your meals to help you stay alert at work and to relax/sleep when you need to rest</p> | <p>salad, fruit, vegetables and milk products;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid fatty, spicy and/or heavy meals as these are more difficult to digest. They can make you feel drowsy when you need to be alert. They may also disturb sleep when you want to rest; • Avoid sugary foods such as chocolate – they provide a short-term energy boost followed by a dip in energy levels; • Fruit and vegetables are good snacks as their sugar is converted into energy relatively slowly and they also provide vitamins, minerals and fibre; • Drink plenty of fluid as dehydration can reduce both mental and physical performance, but avoid drinking too much fluid before sleeping as this may overload the bladder |
| <p>Sleep environment</p> <p>Sleep loss and fatigue are some of the most significant problems for shift workers. It is important to try and maintain your normal level of sleep and rest. Daytime sleep is usually lighter, shorter and of poorer quality than night sleep. It is more frequently disturbed because of warmer temperatures and daytime noise. To help make the environment favourable for sleeping check the tips opposite</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sleep in your bedroom and avoid using for other activities such as watching television, eating or working; • Use heavy curtains, blackout blinds or eye shades to darken the bedroom; • Disconnect the phone or use an answer machine and turn the ringer down; • Ask your family not to disturb you and to keep the noise down when you are sleeping; • Discuss your work pattern with your close neighbours and ask them to try and avoid noisy activities during your sleep time; • If it is too noisy to sleep consider using earplugs, white noise or background music to mask external noises; • Adjust the bedroom temperature to a comfortable level, cool conditions improve sleep |
| <p>Stimulants/sedatives</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caffeine is a stimulant and is present in coffee, tea, cola, “energy drinks” etc as well as in |

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| <p>Shift workers can often turn to stimulants such as coffee or cigarettes to keep them awake and sedatives to help them sleep e.g. alcohol or sleeping pills. Avoid these as tolerance to their effects develops. Persistent use can also increase the risk of dependence.</p> | <p>tablet form. Only use caffeine occasionally and don't rely on it to keep awake. If you do decide to take these consider what might happen when the effects wear off e.g. when driving or operating machinery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid using alcohol to help you sleep – it is associated with earlier wakening, disrupted sleep and poorer sleep quality. Regularly drinking too much increases the risk of long term damage to your physical and mental health, your work and social and personal relationships. • Regular use of sedatives and sleeping pills can lead to dependency and addiction. |
| <p>Family and friends</p> <p>Working shifts that differ from the routines of family and friends can leave you feeling isolated. It is important to make the effort not to lose touch with them</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to family and friends about shift work; if they understand the problems you are facing it will be easier for them to be supportive and considerate. • Make family and friends aware of your shift schedule so they can include you when planning social activities • Make the most of your time off and plan meal times, weekends and evenings together • Plan your domestic duties around your shift schedule and try to ensure that you do not complete them at the cost of rest/sleep. You may need to change the times/days when some jobs are done. • Invite others who work similar shifts to join you in social activities when others are at work and there are fewer crowds. |
| <p>Physical fitness and lifestyle</p> <p>An unhealthy lifestyle combined with shift work may increase the likelihood of sleep disorders and sleep loss and exacerbate existing sleep problems.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve your fitness by spending 30 minutes a day on physical activity, including housework and walking. Consider joining a gym and taking part in regular exercise. • Eat healthy meals on a regular basis. • Cut down on or give up smoking. |

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| <p>A good diet, regular meals and exercise can improve sleep quality, health and well being.</p> | <p>(OHU smoking cessation advice)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decrease you alcohol intake. (OHU alcohol and drugs advice)• Seek advice from OHU if you take regular medication e.g. insulin for diabetes or suffer from a chronic condition e.g. epilepsy if you feel this is being affected by your shift work. <p>(occupational.health@ed.ac.uk)</p> |
| <p>Improve your alertness at work</p> <p>On some shifts, such as night shift, and very early in the mornings, you may find it difficult to remain alert and this can affect your performance. It may also increase your risk of mistakes, injury and accidents.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take moderate exercise before starting work which may increase your alertness during the shift.• Keep lights bright, if possible, at work.• Take regular short breaks during the shift if possible.• Get up and walk around during breaks.• Plan to do more stimulating work at the times you feel most drowsy.• Keep in contact with co-workers as this may help both you and them stay alert. |