



SHIFT WORK & SLEEPINESS

Generally, the body is programmed to sleep best overnight and to be most alert during the day.

But what about people who do shift work?

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HOW CAN SHIFT WORK AFFECT MY SLEEP?

If you work night shift, it might not be easy to sleep enough or to sleep well during the day.

If you start work early in the morning, it might be hard to get enough sleep in the night prior.

The average shift worker sleeps one hour a day less than someone who doesn't work shifts.

Some shift workers sleep up to four hours a day less than normal, but this is not common.

IF I DO SHIFT WORK, AM I MORE LIKELY TO BE TIRED WHILE I AM AWAKE?

Shift workers often complain of being tired, both on and off the job. It may be harder to concentrate and be alert while at work. This means there is more danger of accidents at work and on the road, driving to and from work.

Sleep loss impairs performance:

- 17 hours without sleep is as dangerous as having a blood alcohol content of 0.05%
- 24 hours without sleep is as dangerous as having a blood alcohol content of 0.08%

WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

The human body is designed to be active during the day and rest at night. This rhythm is called the Circadian Rhythm. There are many body hormones that work to keep this in balance. It is not always easy to switch to being active at night and resting during the day.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Make time for enough sleep. Shift workers have to sleep when others are awake. Social and sporting events can sometimes be rearranged so that shift workers can still participate in these activities.

ANY TIPS?

Whatever your shift pattern, try to get enough sleep every day and keep a regular sleep routine.

- Try to sleep in peace! Others in the house need to respect the need of the shift worker to sleep. This may mean removing the telephone from the bedroom and having heavy carpet or curtains in the bedroom to help absorb any noise.
- Some shift workers find that wearing ear plugs to bed and eye covers help.
- A fan or "white noise" machine will help to muffle noise.
- Keep the bedroom cool and dark. Make sure there are no gaps in the curtains.
- Avoid caffeine, sleeping pills, alcohol or cigarettes before going to bed.
- Take a nap before going to work, prior to a late or night shift.
- Some workers are allowed to take a break during their shift. This time can be used for a short nap.

WHAT CAN MY EMPLOYER DO ABOUT IT?

There are health and safety guidelines that employers must adhere to.

Also:

- Avoid back-to-back shifts. After working double or triple shifts, the problems only get worse and safety will be reduced. The rotating shifts where one delays their onset of start time works better with the circadian rhythm. The body clock prefers the Earlies - Lates - Nights rotation rather than the advancing rotation i.e. Nights - Lates - Earlies.
- Schedule the heaviest work that requires the most concentration during day shifts.
- Schedule breaks during night shifts. This allows tired workers to take a nap.

HOW LONG SHOULD A NAP DURING A BREAK BE?

Fifteen minutes is best, avoid napping for any longer. When driving, pull over to a quiet spot and put the seat back. After the nap, walk around for five minutes to wake up properly before resuming other activities.

I AM HAVING PROBLEMS WITH MY SLEEP, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Contact your doctor who may refer you to a sleep specialist.

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