



Living well with shift work

Reflection guide

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Overview

- Validate the experience of shift workers
- Identify the stressors experienced as a result of working shifts
- Identify and share tips & techniques used to improve sleep, health, alertness and relationships

Key takeaways



Main points:

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Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

Job aids or activity materials

Living well with shift work

You will validate the experience of shift workers, identify the stressors experienced as a result of working shifts, and identify and share tips & techniques used to improve sleep, health, alertness and relationships!

The challenges I face when I work shifts are:

The benefits I enjoy when I work shifts are:

Circadian rhythm and sleep

What is sleep?

You likely spend about one-third of your life in the state of unconsciousness known as sleep. But what exactly is going on while you're catching some ZZZs? Probably more than you'd expect.

While sleeping, you move through five phases:

- Awake: It's normal to be awake for short periods during the night. Expect three to 10 brief arousals, though you probably won't remember each one. It's likely part of your body's defense mechanisms to keep you aware of what's going on around you
- Stage one: During stage one, you sleep lightly and drift in and out of sleep. During this stage you're easily wakened. Your muscles begin to slow down and your eyes move very slowly
- Stage two: In stage two, your muscles relax. Your brain waves slow down, though occasionally you have bursts of brain activity. You spend about half of your sleep in this stage
- Stages three and four: Deep sleep sets in. Your brain waves become large and slow. Your breathing becomes rhythmic, and your muscles remain relaxed. At this point your body begins releasing reparative hormones. Stages one through four are referred to as non-rapid eye movement (NREM)
- Rapid eye movement (REM): During REM sleep your muscles stop moving completely. Your breathing and heart rate become rapid and irregular, your blood pressure is more variable, and your eyes move rapidly in bursts of activity. Your brain waves show a pattern similar to wakefulness. Scientists believe this indicates that your brain is using this time to sort and organize your memories. Dreaming takes place during this stage. If you're awakened during REM sleep, you may recall vivid dreams

Throughout the night, you continuously move from one stage or type of sleep to another in cycles that can last from 70 to 90 minutes each. Early REM periods are very short, however, usually 5 to 10 minutes long. You may experience several longer REM periods as the night progresses.

Sleep and circadian rhythms

The natural pattern of waking and sleeping that occurs within a 24-hour day is part of your circadian rhythm. Your circadian rhythm is regulated by a biological clock in your

brain that usually makes you sleepy at night and ready to wake up in the morning. Your surroundings, including your exposure to sunlight, help synchronize your biological clock. Your biological clock regulates your body temperature and many of your hormones.

Most people's clocks run on a cycle of about 24 hours, but individual clocks vary. When your natural circadian rhythm is upset — for example, by spending too long in bed, traveling across time zones or experiencing a few nights of insomnia — sleep can become difficult.

For most people a night or two of poor sleep, or even a night of no sleep, isn't that bad. As long as you get back to a normal sleep schedule within a few days, you'll experience no lasting consequences. One good night of sleep after a few poor ones usually is enough to catch up.

Getting better sleep

1. Develop a pre-bedtime ritual: Read the paper, listen to soft music or take a warm bath before going to bed. Allow yourself to unwind from your shift.
2. Stick to a schedule, and don't sleep late on weekends: If you sleep late on Saturday and Sunday morning, you'll get Sunday night insomnia. Instead, go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.
3. Set your environment for sleeping: Sleep in a dark, slightly cool room. Use room-darkening shades or curtains, or try wearing a sleep mask. Wear earplugs or run a fan to block out daytime noises and make sleep easier. Other ideas can be: turn off your phone ringer, hang a 'do not ring door bell' note on your front door, sleep in the same room – changing this space is not good for your sleep.
4. Don't eat or drink a lot before bedtime: Eat a light dinner about two hours before sleeping. If you drink too much liquid before sleeping, you'll wake up repeatedly in the night for trips to the bathroom. Don't eat spicy or fatty foods. They can cause heartburn, which may interfere with your sleep. Don't drink alcohol near bedtime. It may cause you to wake up repeatedly, to snore, and it may intensify sleep apnea.
5. Avoid caffeine and nicotine: They're addictive stimulants and keep you awake. Smokers often experience withdrawal symptoms at night, and smoking in bed can be dangerous. Caffeine should be avoided for eight hours before your desired bedtime.
6. Choose less frequent rotations: For example, try to work the same shift for three weeks, rather than switching shifts every week. The less your body has to adjust, the easier it is to get good rest.

7. Change the sequence: A more normal sleep pattern results when your shift sequence is day-evening-night rather than day-night-evening. Again, less adjustment for the body.
8. Go to bed when you're tired: If you don't fall asleep in 30 minutes, get up and do something else. Don't agonize over falling asleep. The stress will only prevent sleep.
9. Soak and sack out: Taking a hot shower or bath before bed helps bring on sleep because they can relax tense muscles.
10. Don't rely on sleeping pills: Check with your doctor before using sleeping pills. Doctors generally recommend using sleeping pills for up to four weeks. Make sure the pills won't interact with other medications or with an existing medical condition. If you do take a sleep medication, reduce the dosage gradually when you want to quit.

Consider these questions:

- Where do you sleep? Does your sleeping space change? If so, why? Can you control it?
- Is your sleeping space cluttered?
- Is your room temperature cool?
- Is your sleeping space nearest the busiest place in the house (i.e., kitchen and bathroom)
- Did you turn off your phone? Do you have an answering machine? Did you post a 'Quiet Please. Do not knock/ ring the doorbell' sign on your door?
- What colour are your bedroom walls?
- What kind of curtains do you currently have? Do you have blinds as well?

Eating well

- First of all, you want to schedule regular meals. Try to eat 3 meals in each 24-hour period. It's a good idea to eat a lunch to break up the shift and don't miss breakfast. It will improve your appetite and keep your bowels regular
- Cut back on highly seasoned foods, fried foods and foods high in fat. These are harder to digest
- Limit caffeine-containing foods and beverages like coffee, cola and chocolate. These foods can cause distress in the digestive tract
- Drink less at the end of a shift so you don't interrupt your sleep
- Try eating several healthy small meals/snacks throughout your shift instead of larger meals if it works with your break time

- Try light meals of grains, fruits and vegetables, low fat dairy products and small amounts of lean meat. These are easiest for your body to digest and allow for a deeper, longer sleep
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and greasy foods within five hours of sleep

Practical tips:

- Bring a meal from home as often as possible
- Bring a water bottle to work and keep it handy. Be sure to drink less at the end of your shift
- Pick a day of the week in which you plan/make your lunches
- Buy prepackaged fruits and other healthy snacks
- Avoid the vending machine
- Keep a bottle of light salad dressing, cans of tuna/soup, low-fat granola bars at work
- Organize a healthy potluck with colleagues once a week/month

Exercise

- Work out before work but not before bed: Twenty minutes of aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming, on most days can help you stay alert on the job. It also keeps your heart in tip-top shape. Don't overdo it or you will be too exhausted to work. Try to avoid exercise in the three hours before sleep
- Use your breaks effectively: Include some exercise in your breaks. Try going for a walk around your building. Do some stretches. Try some relaxation exercises such as deep and slow breathing
- Work exercise into your normal routine: Don't take the shortcut. Climb the stairs instead of riding the elevator. If you live close by, walk or bike to work instead of driving
- Find a buddy: Find a co-worker and exercise together, or organize a running/walking group with colleagues, and set goals for yourselves It'll make exercising more fun and will also help keep you motivated

Moderate exercise is key

Moderate activity shouldn't cause discomfort. Your breathing might be increased and you should feel as though you're working. But you shouldn't feel pain or experience exhaustion.

Some examples of moderate-level activity:

- Running 2.5 km in 15 minutes (6 minutes per km)

- Walking 3 km in under 30 minutes (under 10 minutes per km)
- Shoveling snow for 15 minutes
- Raking leaves for 30 minutes
- Swimming laps for 20 minutes
- Dancing fast for 30 minutes

Maintain a healthy emotional and social outlook

Some tips to help you maintain social ties:

- Phone home. Make time to call home and talk with your kids and spouse, whether it's just before bedtime or just after the sun rises
- Publicize your hours. Let your family and friends know your work schedule. Use a bulletin board or stick your schedule on the fridge to let everyone know your sleep hours, naps, gatherings, events, etc. Create a family calendar so you also know what your family's up to. This may be a good way to keep up with household activities
- Communicate with your family/friends: Make time for get-togethers on your days off to keep in touch. Try to have at least one meal together each day. Set aside some time for you and your spouse only (no kids, no TV, etc.)
- Get creative. Make a breakfast date with your spouse, partner or kids — it'll be a nice end-of-the-day treat for you and a nice start-of-the-day treat for someone else. Leave post-it 'love notes' for your partner before you leave for work, or to your kids to tell them how much they mean to you

Relaxation & leisure

In some ways, our quality of life is defined by our leisure time. Learn to relax and enjoy the moment.

- Take a bath
- Read a good book
- Listen to music
- Do deep breathing exercises, meditate or take a yoga class
- Plan activities around your time off

All of these strategies will stimulate and relax your mind.