

A focus on healthy sleep practices for Shift Workers

Almost 22% of America's workforce are shift workers, who need to maintain healthy sleep practices to make sure they do not become sleep deprived. Workers on the night shift especially need to be aware of the potential for sleep deprivation because working at night and sleeping during the day is contrary to human biology.

The risk of working the night shift

Night workers typically get less sleep than other workers because their sleep is often disturbed by noise, light, and other daytime activity. But it is still important to get 7-9 hours of sleep each day, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Not getting the proper amount of sleep is linked with an increased risk for obesity, diabetes, digestive problems, heart disease, higher cholesterol, depression, and anxiety disorders.

What to do

Studies have shown that it's easier for bodies to adjust from daytime to evening to night shifts than the other way around, so you should try to rotate your shifts clockwise. Even if you can't control your work schedule, you can always choose to adopt sleep practices that will lead to better health:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule and a regular meal schedule, even on your days off.
- Keep your bedroom quiet and dark. Use blackout curtains and fans, if necessary. Tell your family and/or roommates about the importance of your uninterrupted sleep. Consider turning off your phone.
- Limit your caffeine intake, especially at the end of your shift.
- Limit your alcohol intake several hours before sleep because it disturbs your sleep pattern and avoid excess alcohol use (no more than 2 drinks for men or 1 drink for women).
- While it is best not to smoke at all, if you do smoke, avoid using nicotine for a few hours before sleep.
- Try to take several short breaks throughout your shift.
- Don't leave your most boring or tedious tasks for the end of your shift.
- Exercise regularly before going to work or during your breaks; avoid vigorous exercise right before bedtime.
- Consider 20-30 minute naps before going to work, during your breaks, or even after your shift before you drive home if you're sleepy.

For more information about sleep deprivation, contact your health care provider, your Concentra health specialist, or visit the CDC's Web site at: www.cdc.gov/sleep.



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