

Shift work and sleep disturbance

It is found that an estimated 20% of workers in industrialised countries have jobs requiring shift work, thus workers face the risk of clinically significant sleep disturbance and daytime drowsiness. Many shift workers find that they never fully adapt to their schedules and deal with disturbed sleep on an ongoing basis. Some tips have been developed by the National Sleep Foundation and can be helpful for shift workers;

- The sleep environment is especially important. Be sure that the bedroom is dark and quiet, with mobiles on silent and landlines unplugged. If there is some unavoidable sound, a fan can help mask it
- Keep the bedroom cool
- Take a warm bath about an hour before retiring to bed
- Avoid stimulating activities such as videogaming prior to bed time
- Don't eat a heavy meal before going to bed and avoid caffeine for at least 5 hours before trying to sleep
- Avoid alcohol for several hours before sleeping
- Exercise should not be sooner than 3 hours before sleep
- When planning a sleep schedule for the week, try to keep a consistent schedule
- Short naps of about 20 minutes can help restore alertness, but longer naps are not helpful
- Short breaks at work can help maintain alertness and conversation/activity can help prevent sleepiness
- By eating regular meals and avoiding fatty foods this can result in decreased sluggish feelings
- Keep bright lights on during shift work to prevent sleepiness and increase alertness

It is important to be alert to signs of sleepiness. When experiencing signs of yawning, eyes closing and head bobbing, this indicates you need to take a break, move around, and increase your level of stimulation.

With regular use of the techniques above, it should be possible for shift workers to function effectively and lead happier lives both on and off the job.

If you require further information regarding sleep disturbance in shift workers please contact Working Life on 1300 369 072 or mail@working-life.net