

The Informed Worker



Driven By Higher Standards

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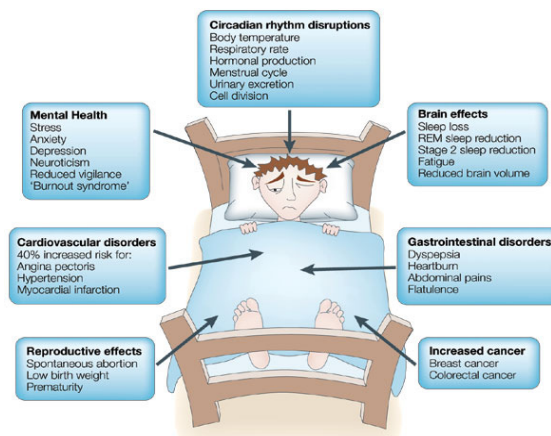
SHIFT WORKERS

Facts to keep in mind ...

- Around 30% of Canadians do some type of shift work (e.g., irregular shifts, night shifts).
- Shift workers tend to sleep less than regular workers (by up to 4 hours).
- They have higher rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, infertility and digestive issues than other workers.
- At night, body functions, such as heart rate and body temperature, slow down so that the body can rest and repair. So health problems can occur when you are not actually asleep at night.
- Keep regular eating patterns of well balanced meals including food from at least 3 of the 4 food groups. Eat lunch in the middle of the day as you normally would, not in the middle of your shift. Night workers should eat lightly throughout the shift and have a moderate breakfast.
- Drink lots of water between meals to avoid dehydration, which may make you tired.
- Minimize your intake of caffeine and alcohol. Caffeine stays in your system for as long as 8 hours. If you drink coffee, do so as early in your shift as possible so that when it is time to sleep, you are able to.
- Avoid excessive use of antacids, tranquilizers and sleeping pills

There's no doubt about it — shift work can be difficult. The demands of juggling alternate work hours and staying connected to family and friends can have a big impact on your health — both mentally and physically. But you can still get enough sleep, eat the right foods, be physically active and maintain social ties — even when you work the graveyard shift.

Health problems associated with shift work



Sleep tips

Changing your normal rhythm of waking and sleeping as a result of switching shifts requires a period of adjustment. If you've ever flown across multiple time zones, you know what can happen when your body's internal clock is disrupted. Insomnia, mental and physical fatigue, indigestion, and an overall feeling of ill health are common.

If your job requires you to constantly change shifts, your body will have more difficulty adjusting and readjusting as you get older. Here are some strategies to help you sleep well:

- 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.
- Set your environment for sleeping. Sleep in a dark room. Use room-darkening shades or wear a sleep mask. Wear earplugs or run a fan to block out daytime noises and make sleep easier.
- Maintain your sleep schedule. If at all possible, keep a consistent sleep schedule. Stick to the same sleep hours every day — even on your days off.
- Choose less frequent rotations. Work a shift for three weeks rather than rotating to a different schedule every week.
- Change the sequence. A more normal sleep pattern results when your shift sequence is day-evening-night rather than day-night-evening.
- Take naps. A short nap — maybe 30 minutes — before your evening shift can help you feel refreshed and more alert at work. Rouse yourself well before your shift starts, though, in case you feel groggy when you first wake up.
- Sleeping pills. If you experience severe insomnia, talk to your doctor.

Nutrition tips

Shift workers may find it difficult to make healthy food choices because what's most readily available in the middle of the night comes from vending machines and 24-hour fast-food restaurants. Unhealthy eating isn't necessarily a given, though. Here are some tips to help you eat well:

- Brown bag it. Bringing food from home will make you less tempted to raid the vending machines. Pack a healthy lunch that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid late-night caffeine. Have caffeinated drinks before your shift or early during your shift. Avoid too much caffeine or caffeine late in your shift — it can make it hard for you to fall asleep after you get home.
- Eat smaller portions. Aim for smaller portions, such as a couple of quick, healthy snacks, during your shift rather than eating a big meal. Shift work can interfere with your body's regular digestive routine. Eating light can reduce the chance of an upset stomach — especially if you're working through the night — because heavier meals are more difficult to digest and can give you heartburn.



Exercise tips

Shift work doesn't mean you can't exercise. Scheduling regular exercise is important — it may help improve your sleep, your energy level and your mood. Don't know if you can fit it into your day — or night? Here are some tips to get the job done:

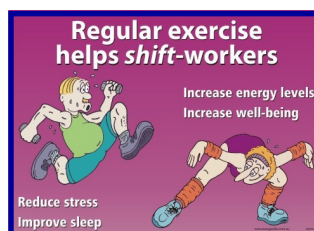
- Work out before work. Twenty minutes of aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, jogging or swimming, on most days can help you stay alert on the job. It also keeps your heart in tip-top shape.
- On the job. During work, use your breaks to exercise. Take a lap around your building. Shoot hoops outdoors. Keep a resistance band or hand weights at work for strength training.
- Don't take the shortcut. Work exercise into your normal routine. Walk or bike to work instead of driving. Climb the stairs instead of riding the elevator.
- Find a buddy. Find a co-worker and exercise together. It'll make exercising more fun.



Social tips

Shift work makes it tough to maintain social ties — after all, you'll be working when most people are socializing. Here are 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. Make time for get-togethers on your days off to keep in touch.
- Get creative. Make a breakfast date — it'll be a nice end-of-the-day treat for you and a nice start-of-the-day treat for someone else.



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