

Sleep Well

Good sleep is integral to our wellbeing. While we sleep, many important functions take place that help repair our body and mind. It supports physical recovery, brain development, heart function, and improves our memory and mood.

Shift work can interfere with getting good sleep. Here are some simple strategies that you may wish to consider to achieve good sleep.

PRIORITISING SLEEP:

It is important for shift workers to prioritise sleep in their lifestyle as much as possible.

- Don't schedule events/tasks in preference to sleep
- Openly discuss with family members the need to prioritise sleep for safety and improved recovery after shift
- Have a dedicated sleep space
- Minimize disturbances e.g. a do not disturb sign on the front door, pets outside
- Use a scheduling app or a diary to help plan your work, social and family obligations around sleep
- Discuss any concerns with a health practitioner
- Discuss any needs you have with your manager

SLEEP HYGIENE:

Sleep hygiene refers to good habits that help improve initiation, duration and quality of sleep. The most important habits for shift workers include:

- Trying to get some exercise, even just a little bit
- Be as consistent as possible with your typical routine for each shift type
- Ensure your bedroom is dark, well ventilated and at a comfortable temperature
- Ensure your bed is comfortable and the bedding is appropriate for the weather
- Reduce caffeine intake 5-6 hours before bed
- Avoid light-emitting devices (e.g. phones, tablets) 1-2 hours before bed
- Eating moderately before bed.
- Limit alcohol intake before bed
- Limit fluid consumption before bed

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU TO SLEEP WELL?

Email us with your suggestions.

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Eat Well

Your brain needs a lot of nutrients to function and keep you well, both physically and mentally.

Eating well can also help to regulate your sleeping patterns, energy levels, and your mental wellbeing.

You may have noticed that your mood often affects the types of food you choose, as well as how much you eat.

Some foods can lift your mood, energy levels, and concentration, while others can have the opposite effect. Eating regular meals that provide the nutrients you need to sustain your energy during shift work can be challenging.

THE FOLLOWING TIPS CAN HELP YOU EAT WELL DURING SHIFT WORK:

- Ensure that you take all meal and tea breaks, especially when on afternoon and night shifts. When on evening and night shifts eat small meals regularly. Taking breaks can help you to regulate those snacks.
- Drink at least one litre of water during a shift, preferably in regular sips, to maintain the fluids that are needed in a healthy work environment.
- Keep to a 'normal' meal pattern, no matter what shift you are working. Eat breakfast in the morning, lunch during the day and dinner in the evening. That means having a smaller, 'breakfast type' meal when you get home from night shift, before you sleep.
- Shopping and meal preparation can be difficult, particularly when you are tired after afternoon and evening shifts and possibly trying to fit meals around other family members. Consider using supermarket home delivery or 'click and collect' services. You might find delivery of fresh food with recipes another good alternative as you adapt to your shift work regime.
- Meal planning is important. Try to plan ahead so that you have access to healthy food options that are easy to take to work or available soon after you return home.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU EAT WELL?

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Socialise Well

Human beings are social creatures. As far back as we can trace, humans have travelled, hunted, and thrived in social groups. These social groups, including family, provide us with an important part of our identity.

The number and strength of our relationships also affect our mental health and wellbeing. Socialising can lower rates of anxiety and depression, increase self-esteem, and help us to have greater empathy and more trusting and cooperative relationships.

In contrast, loneliness can lead to disrupted sleep patterns, elevated blood pressure, and increased cortisol (a stress hormone). It is also a risk factor for depression.

We know that working the unsociable hours of shift work can limit your social interactions. It is therefore important to find ways to continue to develop and nurture your social interactions and keep in touch with those you are close to.

THE FOLLOWING IDEAS MAY BE HELPFUL:

- Shift changes are inevitable when you have to fill a roster. There will be times when you are called in to fill a space. Feel free to say no to such requests or balance these in a way that does not compromise your needs and family commitments. It is OK to say no.
- It is important to maintain friendships and your social life. While some events will be missed, make a list of priorities that you can share with your manager so that they can help you to maintain the relationships that protect your mental wellbeing.
- Date nights can be helpful but might have to be rotated. Be prepared to re-think the concept of date night, it might have to occur at breakfast, lunch or early evening as sleepiness can effect concentration
- Plan family events ahead of time. Pick a few important dates and be careful to not overcommit to attending too many events.
- Talk to others shift workers about how they deal with balancing work and social events.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU WITH SOCIAL BALANCE?

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Exercise Well

Physical activity is the movement of muscles that uses energy. It may be incidental movements such as housework, walking, or climbing stairs. It can also include exercise.

Exercise is physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive and intentional movement. It is intended to improve or maintain physical fitness.

Exercise and physical activity can help maintain your mental wellbeing. Physical activity helps to get blood and oxygen moving around the brain which has positive effects for brain chemistry and function such as:

- Releasing chemicals like endorphins and serotonin that improve your mood and help you to feel good
- Increasing connections with nerve cells in the brain
- Increasing the size of the hippocampus, the area in the brain responsible for memory
- Reducing symptoms of stress and anxiety and improving sleep.

THE FOLLOWING IDEAS CAN HELP YOU FIT EXERCISE INTO YOUR SHIFT WORK LIFE:

- Walking, cycling, and gardening are great forms of exercise and provide a good way to wind down after work
- Join in team sports with other shift workers who understand that you can't always get there every week
- Use a physical activity planner to schedule in activity around your shifts
- Join a gym with accessible hours

Remember, exercise doesn't need to be hardcore, just move your body!

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU EXERCISE WELL?

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