

Fatigue Management - Guidelines for Work, Rest and Play

Managing fatigue and shiftwork

Shift workers are a very special group of employees who ask a lot from their bodies, their families and their friends. If you do shift work, you need to look after yourself and take your health and safety needs seriously.

Family and social support for a shift work lifestyle can go a long way towards helping you adapt to your situation.

Shift work can affect work performance if not managed properly, as sleep problems reduce levels of alertness and concentration, impair hand-eye coordination, increase stress, and increase error rate.

To manage shiftwork and reduce the effect of fatigue, responsibilities lie with both the employer and employee.

Outside of work, fatigue can be just as hazardous. Driving when you are tired, especially long distances, presents a serious risk to your safety and the safety of others. If you are *sleepy when you finish your shift, do not drive home, or get someone else to take you home.*

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES	EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES
Ensuring safe work practices (eg. sensible overtime procedures).	Fitness for work (eg. adequate rest and recuperation).
Ensuring good work systems (eg. scheduling work at appropriate times of the day).	Lifestyle management (including the use of drugs and alcohol).
Appropriate and safe roster design to allow for adequate recuperation.	Incidence reporting (of fatigue-related incidents).
Appropriate and safe shift length.	

Eat well

The food you eat has a significant impact on the way you feel, your energy levels and how well you sleep. Your digestive system follows a body clock rhythm by automatically preparing itself for food at various times of the day (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and by slowing down at night. Any food eaten at night is digested at a slower rate and can result in uncomfortable side effects.

DO	DON'T
Eat your main meal at midday or early evening.	Eat large meals in the middle of the night.
Eat light meals at night.	Eat food high in sugar and fat, especially 'fast food'.
Allow at least three hours to digest food before sleep.	Eat lots of protein at night, such as red meat, as it is difficult to digest.
Eat pasta, grains, sandwiches, salads etc at night as they are easily digested.	
Drink reasonable amounts of liquid.	

Exercise

Myth: Exercise is pointless if you cannot maintain high levels on a regular basis. This is false. Regular, moderate Exercise is beneficial, especially if you can keep your heart rate up for 30 minutes, 3 to 4 times a week. Exercise is proven to improve sleep, decrease fatigue, increase energy levels, reduce muscle tension and act as a buffer against stress.

Sleep well

Try to recreate the best sleeping environment by adjusting the temperature of the room, minimising noise and darkening the room. Decreasing the use of stimulants, eating the right food and maintaining a regular exercise routine will also help.

If you have trouble getting to sleep, try relaxing/ non-stimulating activities such as reading or taking a shower, avoid having a big meal or drinking a lot before going to bed and try to reduce worrying thoughts.

Caffeine - Avoid caffeine for 3 to 4 hours before sleep.
 Alcohol - Too much alcohol can reduce the quality of sleep and increase the need for waking.
 Smoking - Like caffeine, smoking is also a stimulant.
 Exercise - Try light and gentle exercise such as walking, as hard exercise before sleep will act as a stimulant.

Manage your family and social life

Here are some tips to help your family and friends adjust to your roster and allow you to remain fatigue-free at work.

- Talk about your roster with your family and friends, and try to help them understand the different nature of shiftwork, working at night, and the importance of sleep.
- Work out and agree on the best way for you to get the sleep you need without interruptions. This is especially important for those with young families.
- Plan to make the most of your time off, give your family a copy of your schedule and let your friends know when you are free.
- Arrange with friends on shiftwork to join in day time sport or other activity.
- Talk to neighbours about your roster; so they can minimise the impact of any noise.