

Tip Sheet: Coping with Shift Work

About 1 in 5 Americans are involved in some form of shift work. For these individuals, work schedules may sometimes people go against the body's natural sleep and wake cycle. Some individuals who are involved in shift work have difficulty adjusting to the different sleep and wake schedule. This can result in difficulty sleeping when trying to sleep, or excessive sleepiness when needing to stay awake. Other people may experience difficulty concentrating, headaches or lack of energy.

Fortunately, not every shift worker experiences all or even any of these difficulties. However, if you do experience difficulties, there are several things you can do to cope.

Make Sleep a Priority

People who work evening or rotating shifts might have to prepare for sleep even though it might be daylight outside. Whenever possible, try to minimize exposure to light on your way home from work if you are on the night shift to keep morning sunlight from activating your internal "daytime clock." Follow bedtime rituals and try to keep a regular sleep schedule - even on weekends. Go to sleep as soon as possible after work. It is important to get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep every day.

At home, ask family and friends to help create a quiet, dark and peaceful setting during your sleep time. Have family members wear headphones to listen to music or watch TV. Encourage people in the household to avoid vacuuming, dish washing, and other noisy activities during your sleep time. Put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the front door so that delivery people and friends will not knock or ring the doorbell.

Additional Tips

According to the National Sleep Foundation, there are several general guidelines for decreasing unwanted effects of shift work:

- Maintain a sleep diary. This can help identify the problem and monitor its progression over time.
- If possible, limit extended work hours. Make sure you have time to sleep and participate in family and social activities.
- If possible, try to avoid excessively long commutes, which can take time away from time for sleep.
- Get enough sleep on your days off. Practice good sleep hygiene by planning and arranging a sleep schedule and by avoiding caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine.
- Do not start a night shift with sleep deprivation. Plan a nap before the night shift. Naps can improve alertness in night shift workers.
- For some workers, appropriate light exposure during the early part of the shift can improve alertness during the shift.

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Rotating Shifts

Many shift workers work rotating shifts. To prepare for a new shift, many workers find it helpful to adjust their sleep and wake time gradually. If you begin adjusting your sleep and wake time for three days prior to your new shift, it will be a smoother change. If you're rotating clockwise, this will mean you'll delay your bedtime and wake up time by an hour or two each night

These tips help many people cope with some of the most common challenges of shift work. However, if you find that these tips are not enough to help you feel better, always talk to your doctor about your symptoms. For more information, or for additional resources, call SupportLinc at 888-881-5462 or visit our website at www.supportlinc.com.

Source: National Sleep Foundation. Website: <https://sleepfoundation.org/>