



Work Smart Live Smart

Stress Smart Shift Work

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With the invention of the light bulb came the introduction of the 24-hour society. Other than our own biological clock, including our need for rest and sleep, there are very few limits to when we can perform almost any task.

Before the light bulb few people worked outside of daylight hours. Now nearly 20% of employees in industrialized countries are employed in shift work.

Industrialists in the 1800's realized that they could more efficiently operate their equipment and increase their profits if they ran around the clock. Shutting down and subsequently starting back up was expensive and inefficient. From the steel mills and automobile production plants to food and service industries production is now scheduled on a 24-hour bases.

We can see growth towards even more sectors working on a 24-hour clock with the advancement of the technology age. Call centers to brokerage houses - the need to be connected, kept informed, and to do business around the world means that more and more individuals will be working non-standard shifts.

Though shift work may be 'good' for business, it can take a huge toll on the workers and their families. If not handled properly, it can in fact cause the company more than they may have bargained or budgeted for through accidents, absenteeism and lowered productivity.

Shift Work Maladaption Syndrome or Shift Work Sleep Disorder is where shift work is leaving the worker so sleepy that they fear for their safety on the job

What causes shift stress?

- Working at night - The body's biological clock tries to reset itself around 3-4:00 a.m. and if you are awake this process is interrupted. Performing routine tasks becomes more difficult, reaction times are slowed and judgment is diminished
- Bad shift scheduling – Problems could result from rotation conflict, not enough time in between or not enough time on a particular shift to allow complete adjustment
- Lack of quality sleep - Interruptions, sleeping pills, and other activities may interfere with the type of sleep a person may get

- Dehydration - Failure to pay attention to the need for water can lead to dry mouth, headaches, blood pressure problems etc.
- Workplace environment – Poor lighting, monotonous background noise and lack of a stimulating activity can have a sedating effect
- Being a lark vs. an owl type person

Mental Symptoms

- Increased irritability and moodiness
- Snapping or losing control
- Sensitivity and defensiveness
- Forgetfulness and lack of concentration which can lead to poor quality, injuries, and accidents
- Lack of motivation
- Depression

Physical Symptoms

- Sleepiness
- Loss of energy - chronic fatigue can make the person more vulnerable to other illnesses
- Sleep-Awake Disorders
- Gastrointestinal Disorders – constipation and diarrhoea are 2-3 times more common than in daytime workers (Circadian Learning Centre)
- Cardiovascular - increased risks of high blood pressure and heart attacks due to poor diet, increased smoking, and fewer leisure activities by up to 50% (Circadian Learning Centre)
- Fluid retention
- Dehydration, dry mouth
- Increase colds and flu's
- Headaches
- Lack of sex drive
- Some evidence showing interference with conception and pregnancy
- Substance use - caffeine, alcohol, drugs

Individual Strategies

- ❑ **Understand the hazards and consequences of shift work. Shift work is a lifestyle.**

- ❑ Pay attention to sleep strategies and avoid going into sleep debt. Learn to take short naps on break or after eating - buddy up to ensure that each does not over-sleep. 10-20 minutes for a short nap will allow you to carry on, and will not leave you feeling groggy as you have not yet reached deep sleep
- ❑ Eat frequently and nutritiously. Drink plenty of water
- ❑ Take short breaks throughout the shift
- ❑ Exercise and stretch during breaks to reduce sleepiness during shift and to promote sleep after a shift. Stretching major muscles helps to bring oxygen to the brain
- ❑ Deep breathing helps to boost energy, as we tend to breathe very shallow when we get tired
- ❑ Aromatherapy - certain scents such as peppermint and citrus are known to promote alertness while lavender has a sedating effect
- ❑ Take a shower to promote alertness or simply use the stimulating effects of a cold face wash
- ❑ Decrease/eliminate use of caffeine, alcohol and sleeping pills which temporarily fool the body into thinking its functioning properly and look for other strategies to promote alertness and sleep
- ❑ Don't leave the most tedious or boring tasks to the end of your shift when you are the drowsiest
- ❑ Work with a buddy who can keep you alert by talking and who can be aware of the signs of drowsiness. Support and share strategies with fellow shift workers
- ❑ Be concerned about safety going to and from work. Carpool or use public transit. Nap or exercise before heading home if extremely tired
- ❑ Decrease exposure to light at the end of a night shift by wearing dark sunglasses on commute home
- ❑ Increase exposure to bright light during shift and after sleep, which signals our bodies to be alert especially during the shift slump
- ❑ Try to move forward in shift rotations. (e.g. days-evenings-nights-days) This forward rotation follows the rotation of your body clock and therefore your adjustment will be easier
- ❑ Solicit support from family and friends. Discuss strategies to handle and diffuse shift work irritability

- ❑ Remember the advantages of shift work such as uncrowded stores and the ability to attend some daytime events such as school plays
- ❑ Make a schedule and stick to it. Do not try to adjust schedule between shifts - if on fixed nights continue schedule through days off

Disruption in relationships, family and social life can result in social isolation for the shift worker. Family events may be missed. Meeting other people can be a particularly difficult challenge for single shift workers. A lack of energy and fatigue prevents many shift workers from having enough energy to have a social life.

10 Strategies To Increase Support

- Bring up problems early
- Make dates with partner/children
- Set up a family bulletin board
- Use a pager for emergency calls
- Let family and friends know your schedule
- Make use of email and the phone to stay in-touch with friends on different schedules
- Stress the importance of your daytime sleep and minimize any interruptions
- Limit your commitments to later in the day to avoid cutting in to valuable sleeping hours and to avoid resetting your circadian rhythms
- Pursue hobbies and sports that can bring you together with like-minded people such as a health club, pool, and bowling leagues
- Be creative - you may find other shift workers in places like the grocery store or coffee shop

Though shift work may be 'good' for business, if not handled properly, it can have disastrous effects on the health and productivity of the shift worker. Shift work is a lifestyle and in order to avoid shift work maladaptation syndrome the individual must ensure that they follow a healthy schedule, focus on their sleep strategies and ensure that they have support from those around them.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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