

Ways to help you cope with shift work

When you work shifts, particularly the night shift, your body clock is knocked out of its normal rhythm.

Your body clock is linked to the daily cycle of day and night, light and dark. It regulates all the functions of the body including body temperature, kidney function, blood pressure and digestion.

Your digestive system slows down at night. If you are awake overnight, you may have difficulty digesting certain foods.

When working the night shift your body is ready for sleep, you become less alert, physically less strong, mentally less clear and digestion is poor.

After your night shift, your body is starting to wake up with your digestion, kidneys and other bodily systems ready for a day's work.

Ways to help Sleep Routine

Make your bedroom as much like night-time as you can.

Sleep on the quieter side of the house. To minimise sound disturbances, try using ear plugs.

Keep the room dark. Use heavy curtains/blinds, a blanket over the window or eye masks.

Keep the room cool, use a light quilt and consider using a fan to keep air circulating.

If you can't manage a longish period of quality sleep (at least 4 hours) it may help to try naps at different times of the day.

For example, several hour-long naps at different times of the day with the final one an hour or two before you go to work.

If you do wake, try lying still in the dark with your eyes shut to help you go back to sleep.

Avoid liquid towards the end of your night shift. You will be drifting off to sleep but will then have to get up to go to the toilet.

Readjusting between Shifts

After your last night shift, try sleeping for a maximum 4 hours, then get up and continue the day as normal so that you can return to sleep at your "normal" time later that night.

Before returning to a set of nights, try and take a nap (1 to 3 hours) in the late afternoon prior to your first night shift.

Indigestion

Indigestion often affects shift workers. Its effects include heartburn, belching, flatulence, trapped wind, bloating and nausea.

There are many possible causes of indigestion:

- Too much rich or fatty food.
- Too much alcohol.
- Eating too much, too quickly or too soon before going to bed.
- Smoking.
- Some medicines, (aspirin, ibuprofen and some anti-inflammatory drugs).

Indigestion Remedies

Antacids may be helpful in the short term but should not be used for longer than two weeks.

- Avoid rich and fatty foods.
- Eat spicy and salty foods in moderation.
- Cut down on caffeine, alcohol and smoking.
- Lose weight if you need to.
- Avoid big meals.
- Allow time to digest food before lying down.
- Avoid aspirin or ibuprofen if prone to ulcers or stomach upsets.
- See your GP if indigestion is a persistent problem.
- Try to eat healthily regardless of what shift pattern you are on.

Family and Social Life

Shift work can disrupt your family and social life. Try to have one meal a day as a family. Be realistic about what you can do on your days off. Recognise you may be moody or irritable because of your shift work. Make the most of your free time.

Keep Fit

Keeping fit and exercising regularly can positively affect your heart, lungs, stamina, weight and overall wellbeing.

Exercise can help you to:

- Achieve and maintain your correct weight.
- Improve heart and lung capacity.
- Improve stamina and strength.
- Increase suppleness.
- Raise your temperature, help you “wake up” and feel more alert.
- Improve digestive efficiency.
- Improve the quality of your sleep.

Try to exercise for at least 20 minutes three times a week. For example try brisk walking, swimming, running, circuit training or cycling – see which activity suits you best. In addition, you could:

- Walk on short trips where you may usually take the car.
- Use stairs where you usually use lifts.

If you have a medical condition listed within the assessment questionnaire you should notify your GP that you undertake shift work.



A copy of this & other documentation can be found from <https://mohs.co.uk/resources> or using the QR code here.

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