



Information for Patients

# COPING WITH SHIFTWORK



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Shiftwork refers to any type of work that is performed outside the usual working hours, including work performed at night-time, or on a rotating basis.

Any type of shift work has the potential to affect an individual's health, relationships, family and social life. However, these factors can be managed. Some suggestions to help you cope with shift work include:

- Maintain a regular sleep pattern that allows you an average of at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep per day
- Ensure your sleep is not disturbed by mobile phones ringing, pets and radios
- Sleep environments should be dark, quiet, cool and comfortable
- Take measures to relax and unwind following your night-shift before you go to bed, such as reading, slow walking, or watching television
- Experiment with sleeping times to find out what works best for you, e.g. some people have an afternoon nap prior to starting a block night-shift, others stay up late the night before and sleep during the day before their shift commences
- Have regular meal times, especially during your shift (often, a hot meal for 'lunch' gives you something to look forward to during your shift)
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet and be especially careful about what you eat and drink before bed
- Avoid coffee, caffeine and other stimulants in the last few hours before sleep (caffeine has a half life of around 6 hours and can impair sleep quality)
- Exercise regularly during your leisure time  
Plan social activities for your days off to ensure that you get enough sleep; make the most of your time off – let your friends know when you are free
- Ensure your family and friends are aware of the nature of your roster so that you are not disturbed during your sleeping times, and that important family events are planned with your needs in consideration
- Consider public transport or car-pooling if concerned about driving home in the morning following your night-shifts
- Never drive if you are feeling tired
- Listen to music or the radio when driving on your way home; avoid having the heater on as this often promotes drowsiness
- Talk with your General Practitioner if you have a long-term condition that shift work may affect, or if any medication regimes may be disrupted by your shift work commitments.