Shift Work

Shift work is any work schedule that is outside the normal business day.

**Pros of Shift Work**

- **Monetary Compensation.** Swing and graveyard are often paid a nighttime differential.
- **Autonomy.** Shift workers often perform their duties with less supervision.
- **Flexible Schedule.** Sometimes eliminating the need for childcare or other services.
- **Reduced Workload.** Night shifts are often not as busy as their daytime counterparts.

**Cons of Shift Work**

- **Daytime Sleepiness.** 29% of shift workers fall asleep at work several times a week.
- **Disrupted Sleep Schedules.** Days off frequently result in an erratic sleep/wake pattern.
- **Insomnia.** After awakening, resuming sleep can be very difficult if not impossible.
- **Relationship Problems.**
- **Irritability.** One of the first signs of sleep deprivation.
- **Reduced Performance/Decreased Mental Clarity.** 24 hours of continuous wakefulness have effects on driving similar to a blood alcohol level of .10
- **Depression.** Night shifts can cause feelings of isolation and serious mood disorders.
- **Gastrointestinal Problems.** The metabolic cycle can be disrupted resulting in ulcers, heartburn, nausea, abdominal pain, or indigestion.
- **Decreased Immune System.** Lack of sleep can make one more vulnerable to illness.
- **Great Risks of Cardiovascular Disease.**
- **Unhealthy Eating Habits.** Availability of healthy food is often quite limited.
- **Increased Use of Stimulants.** Caffeine, nicotine, and illegal drugs.
Shift Work tips

The best techniques acknowledge the circadian rhythm and try to work with it, rather than combat it. Circadian literally means “about a day” but generally refers to the 24 hour cycle of our bodies. The two main triggers of human circadian rhythm are light and temperature. Knowing this we can manipulate light exposure and room temperature to the shift worker’s advantage.

Tricks of the Light

- **Sunglasses.** Start preparing for sleep by wearing sunglasses on the ride home.
- **Blackout Blinds.** A dark environment will help trigger sleep onset.
- **Eye Mask.** Even the light from a digital clock can disrupt or prevent sleep.
- **Turn Off the TV.** Watching a box that emits light does not promote sleep.
- **Proper Sunlight Exposure.** Shortly after rising expose hands and face to direct sunlight for 10-15 minutes. This can help to trigger sleep 12-16 hours later.

Temperature Tricks

- **Reduce Bedroom Temp.** Studies suggest optimum room temperature for sleep is 60-65°F.
- **Take a Warm Bath.** It’s important to keep hands and feet warm to trigger sleep onset.
- **Exercise Shortly After Waking.** Exercise raises body temperature. Raising your body temperature at an appropriate time can lead to a drop in body temperature at the appropriate time.

General Tips

- **Have a Set Schedule.** Wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day.
- **Create a Quiet Environment.** This could mean earplugs, a white noise machine, a “Do Not Disturb” sign, or post your sleep schedule so family respects your quiet time.
- **Develop a Sleep Ritual.** An effective example is to create a list of tomorrow’s tasks. This allows the mind to relax rather than ruminate on what needs to be done.
- **Purchase a Video Camera.** Allows you to view events without changing sleep pattern.
- **Schedule a Family Day.** Stay connected with family to reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Power Naps.** 10 minute naps can provide alertness that lasts for over 2 hours.
- **Healthy Diet.** This means planning ahead. Vending machines and prepackaged meals may not provide adequate nutrition.
- **Get Enough Fluid.** Dehydration can increase feelings of fatigue.
- **Increase Physical Fitness.** Exercise can reduce stress, the #1 cause of insomnia.
- **Make Sleep a Priority.** Sleep is as important to health as diet and exercise.