

Dealing with Irregular work patterns:

Tips from those who know...

<p>Communication</p>	<p>If you're new to shiftwork, ask advice from colleagues who have been doing it longer. What have they learned?</p> <p>Talk to friends and family about shiftwork. If they understand the challenges, it may help them to be supportive and considerate</p> <p>Help your family/friends to understand that sleep is non-negotiable after a period of difficult shifts</p> <p>Working shifts/rotas can leave people feeling isolated from family/friends if their schedules are different; it's important to talk to friends/family and maintain your social networks even if this is by phone or Facetime/Skype/Zoom/House Party</p> <p>If you feel shiftwork is having a prolonged, adverse effect on your physical or mental well-being: please talk to your Manager</p>
<p>Food / Drink</p>	<p>If you're on night shift, try to stick to a similar eating pattern to the one you follow during the day</p> <p>Keep hydrated while working. However, if you are on night shift, try to reduce liquid intake from around 2.00am onwards. This can help reduce the likelihood of poor quality/disturbed sleep.</p> <p>Have something light to eat before bed but try to avoid foods that are difficult to digest, e.g. fried, spicy or processed meals.</p> <p>Reduce consumption of sugary foods. Although they provide a short-term energy boost, this is quickly followed by an energy dip.</p>
<p>Regular patterns</p>	<p>Try to follow as regular a sleep pattern as you can; around 7 to 9 hours works for most people</p> <p>Don't delay going to bed. The longer you delay going to bed, the more awake you may become</p> <p>Remember that, the more consecutive nights you've worked, the more "sleep debt" you'll have accrued. So, catching up on your sleep as quickly as possible will help you to recover more quickly.</p>

Environment	<p>Make sure the bedroom is as dark as possible.</p> <p>Switch off the TV and digital devices in your bedroom</p>
Stimulants	<p>Avoid smoking/drinking before bed. These may cause sleep difficulties</p> <p>Try to reduce your caffeine intake; in particular, no coffee for least 4 hours before heading to bed. However, small regular doses of caffeine while working can enhance wakefulness and performance. People often have a large coffee at the beginning of their shift in order to jump-start their day. However, research suggests taking a different approach will maximize the positive effects of caffeine for shift workers. Shift workers who consume smaller (around quarter cups of coffee) more frequently throughout the working day experienced enhanced wakefulness and performed better on cognitive tests than those who had had no caffeine.</p> <p>As night shift workers may have little opportunity for regular sun exposure, the primary way your body gets Vitamin D, it may be worth considering a Vitamin D Supplement (NB Get medical advice before taking). Vitamin D works with calcium to promote strong bones and prevent osteoporosis. It's also involved in cell production, neuromuscular and immune function, and the reduction of inflammation.</p>
Exercise	<p>If you get off shift, and you are not tired, try exercising for 15 minutes followed by a shower</p>
Alertness	<p>On some shifts, you may find it difficult to remain alert and, obviously, this may affect performance. It can also increase the risk of errors, injury and accidents. You may find it helpful to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take moderate exercise before starting work which may increase your alertness during the shift. • take regular short breaks during the shift if possible • get up and move during breaks • plan to do more stimulating work at the times you feel most drowsy if possible • Work in as much light as you can; where possible increase light exposure during your shift with overhead lights, a bright desk lamp or lightbox