

## STIMULANTS AND SEDATIVES

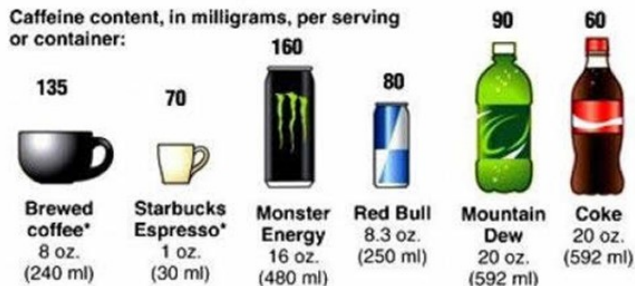
Night workers often turn to stimulants such as coffee or cigarettes to keep them awake and sedatives such as alcohol or sleeping pills to help them sleep.

**Avoid such aids - they only have short-term effects on alertness as tolerance to their effects develops.**

Caffeine is a mild stimulant present in coffee, tea and cola as well as in tablet form and in special 'energy' drinks. It can improve reaction time and feelings of alertness **for short periods.**

*Moderate daily intake of caffeine (200 to 300 mg) normally is not harmful, but too much can cause negative health side effects.*


Caffeine content, in milligrams, per serving or container:



**Only use caffeine occasionally; don't rely on it to keep you awake.**

■ Avoid the use of alcohol to help you fall asleep. Although alcohol can promote the onset of sleep it is also associated with earlier awakenings, disrupted sleep and poorer sleep quality.

■ Regularly drinking too much increases the risk of long-term damage to your physical and mental health, your work, social and personal relationships.

 Regular use of sleeping pills and other sedatives to aid sleep are not recommended because they can lead to dependency and addiction. Routine drug & alcohol testing is done on site. **All medications should be declared.**

## PHYSICAL FITNESS AND A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE

As well as a good diet & regular meals, exercise can improve sleep quality, health and well-being.

- Improve your fitness by spending 30 minutes a day on a physical activity e.g. housework, walking, joining a gym or taking part in exercise classes;
- Cut down or give up smoking;
- Reduce your alcohol intake;



## STAY CONNECTED WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS

Working night shifts that differ from the routines of friends & family can leave you feeling isolated; it is important to make the effort to stay in touch with them:

- Make your family and friends aware of your night schedule so they can include you when planning social activities;
- Make the most of your time off and plan mealtimes, weekends and evenings together;
- Plan your domestic duties around your shift schedule. Try to ensure that you do not complete them at the cost of rest / sleep. You may need to change the times / days when some jobs are done;



## IMPROVING YOUR ALERTNESS AT WORK

On night shifts you may find it difficult to remain alert; this can affect your performance. It may also increase the risk of errors, injury and accidents.



- Take moderate exercise before starting work which may increase your alertness during the shift.
- Keep the light bright at work;
- Take regular short breaks during the shift if possible;
- Get up and walk around during breaks;
- Plan to do more stimulating work at the times you feel most drowsy;
- Keep in contact with co-workers as this may help both you and them stay alert.

## HEALTH ASSESSMENT

- ✓ Employers must offer workers a free health assessment before they become a night worker.
- ✓ The assessment must be written by a qualified health professional. It can be a questionnaire.
- ✓ A repeat assessment must be offered regularly. Seek advice from your site nurse or GP if you require regular medication such as insulin for diabetes or suffer from a chronic condition such as epilepsy.



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## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

## NIGHT WORK

## A Workers Guide



People vary in how they cope with night work depending on their health, fitness, age, lifestyle, and domestic responsibilities— some adapt well, others do not.

Irregular hours of work and work patterns that include night shifts can lead to disruption of the internal body clock, sleeping difficulties and fatigue.

The hints and tips in the leaflet draw on commonly available advice and best practice from a range of sources and may improve sleep quality, increase alertness and reduce health risks for night workers.

# Occupational Health

## IDENTIFY A SUITABLE SLEEP SCHEDULE



Most adults need 7-8 hours' sleep a day although this may decrease with age. If you cannot do this, try to rest, as this is still beneficial.

Recording sleep patterns and problems using a diary may help to explain fatigue and tiredness. It

can also be used to help find the most suitable strategies and conditions for a better quality of sleep.

- Have a short sleep before your first night shift;
- If coming off night shifts, have a short sleep and go to bed earlier that night;
- Once you have identified a suitable sleep schedule try to keep to it.

## TRYING TO SLEEP AFTER WORKING THE NIGHT SHIFT



- ❑ It is important to try and maintain your normal level of sleep and rest;
- ❑ Daytime sleep is usually lighter, shorter and of poorer quality than night time sleep, AND
- ❑ More frequently disturbed because of warmer temperatures and daytime noise.

## MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT FAVOURABLE FOR SLEEPING

- ❑ Use heavy curtains, blackout blinds or eye shades to darken the bedroom;
- ❑ Ask your family not to disturb you;

## MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT FAVOURABLE FOR SLEEPING continued,

- Sleep in your bedroom and avoid using it for other activities such as watching television, eating and working;
- Disconnect the phone, use an answer machine / turn the ringer down;
- Discuss your work pattern with neighbours.



- Ask neighbours to try and avoid noisy activities;
- Consider using earplugs, white noise or background music to mask external noises;
- Adjust the bedroom temperature to a comfortable level, cool conditions improve sleep.

**Sleep loss and fatigue are some of the most significant problems for night workers.**

## TECHNIQUES TO PROMOTE SLEEP

Try to follow a similar routine to the one you follow before a normal night's sleep. The following tips may help you relax after a night shift and promote sleep:

- Go for a short walk, relax with a book, listen to music and / or take a hot bath before bed;
- Avoid vigorous exercise before sleep as it is stimulating and raises body temperature;
- Avoid caffeine, 'energy' drinks and other stimulants a few hours before bedtime as they can stop you going to sleep;
- Don't go to bed feeling hungry: have a light meal or snack before sleeping but avoid fatty, spicy and / or heavy meals, as these are more difficult to digest and can disturb sleep;
- Avoid alcohol as it lowers the quality of sleep.



## DRIVING TO AND FROM WORK

Driving to and from work can be risky, particularly after a night shift. The following strategies may help safer driving:

- ❑ Consider using public transport or a taxi rather than driving;
- ❑ Exercise briefly before journeying;
- ❑ Share driving if possible;
- ❑ Drive carefully and defensively;
- ❑ Do not hurry;
- ❑ Stop if you feel sleepy; if it's safe take a short nap;
- ❑ Make **occasional** use of caffeine or 'energy' drinks.



**CAR SHARE**

## DIET

It is **very important** to consider the timing and quality of meals. Digestive problems are common in night workers due to disruption of the body clock & poor diet.

**Plan your meals** to help you stay alert at work and to relax / sleep when you need to rest.

- Regular light meals / snacks are less **likely to affect alertness** or cause drowsiness than a single heavy meal;
- Choose foods that are **easy to digest**, e.g. pasta, rice, bread, salad, fruit, vegetables & milk products;
- **Avoid fatty, spicy** and / or heavy meals as these are more difficult to digest.

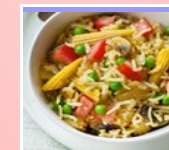
**Heavy meals** can make you feel **drowsy** when you need to be alert. They may also **disturb sleep** when you need to rest;

- Avoid **sugary foods**, e.g. chocolate – they provide a short-term energy boost followed by a dip in energy;
- Fruit and vegetables are good snacks as their sugar is converted into energy **slowly**; they also provide vitamins, minerals & fibre;
- **Drink fluids**, dehydration can reduce mental and physical performance
- Avoid drinking too much fluid before sleep to prevent **bladder overload**.

These recipes and more can be found at:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life-beta/recipes>



**Beefed up sarnies**



**Savoury rice**