



# Fatigue-busting strategies for shift workers

Fatigue can be a significant challenge for shift workers due to irregular work schedules and disruptions to their natural sleep-wake cycle. Implementing effective fatigue countermeasures is crucial to ensure the safety, health, and productivity of shift workers.

**Here are some examples tailored specifically for shift workers:**

## Sleep management

Establish a consistent sleep schedule, even on days off, to maintain your circadian rhythm. Incorporate sleep hygiene practices, such as creating a dark, quiet, and comfortable sleep environment, relaxation techniques or mindfulness exercises can help shift workers wind down before bedtime.

## Napping

Short naps (20-30 minutes) such as the NASA nap (26mins) during breaks or before shifts can combat sleepiness and improve alertness.

## Light exposure

Utilise bright, natural light during night shifts to help regulate the body's internal clock and promote alertness. Outdoor breaks or exposure to daylight during breaks can help reset circadian rhythms.

## Physical activity

Promote regular exercise and physical activity outside of work hours to improve overall health and enhance sleep quality. Offer on-site fitness facilities or wellness programs to support shift workers in staying active.

## Stress management

Provide resources for stress reduction techniques, such as mindfulness meditation or stress management workshops, to help shift workers cope with the demands of their job. Encourage open communication and provide support for shift workers experiencing stress or burnout.

## Nutrition and hydration

Healthy snacks and meals during shifts will help maintain energy levels and prevent fatigue-related dips in performance. By incorporating fatigue-fighting foods into your workday meals and snacks, you can support sustained energy levels, improve focus and productivity, and reduce the risk of fatigue-related dips in performance.

- Foods rich in complex carbohydrates provide a steady source of energy and help prevent blood sugar spikes and crashes.
- Protein is essential for maintaining energy levels and promoting muscle health. Protein-rich snacks like nuts, seeds, and hard-boiled eggs can also help stave off hunger and keep you energized.
- Incorporating healthy fats into your diet can provide a concentrated source of energy and help keep you feeling satisfied between meals. Include sources of healthy fats such as avocados, nuts, seeds, olive oil, and fatty fish like salmon and tuna.
- Staying hydrated is essential for maintaining energy levels and cognitive function.

## Fatigue risk management systems

Implement policies and procedures for monitoring and managing fatigue risks, such as regular fatigue assessments, workload management strategies, and opportunities for feedback from shift workers.

By incorporating these fatigue countermeasures into shift work practices, employers can help mitigate the adverse effects of fatigue on shift workers' health, safety, and performance. It's essential to involve shift workers in the development and implementation of these strategies to ensure their effectiveness and acceptance.

# Sleep hygiene for shift workers

Sleep hygiene recommendations for shift workers are crucial for helping them achieve better sleep quality and manage their irregular work schedules effectively.

**Here are some sleep hygiene tips specifically tailored for shift workers:**

## Establish a consistent sleep schedule

While it may be challenging due to rotating shifts, try to establish a consistent sleep schedule as much as possible, even on days off. Consistency helps regulate your body's internal clock.

## Create a sleep-conducive environment

Make your bedroom dark, quiet, and comfortable. Use blackout curtains or eye masks to block out sunlight, and use earplugs or white noise machines to minimise noise disturbances.

## Limit exposure to light

Exposure to bright light, especially blue light from electronic devices, can disrupt your sleep-wake cycle. Minimise exposure to screens before bedtime and consider wearing blue light-blocking glasses if you need to use electronic devices.

## Use relaxation techniques

Engage in relaxation techniques like deep breathing, meditation or progressive muscle relaxation before bed to help your body unwind and prepare for sleep.

## Limit caffeine and stimulants

While caffeine can help you stay awake during night shifts, excessive consumption can disrupt your sleep when you need to rest. The cut-off time for consuming caffeine before bed varies from person to person, as individuals have different sensitivities to caffeine and metabolise it at different rates. However, as a general guideline, it's recommended to avoid consuming caffeine at least six hours before bedtime to minimize its disruptive effects on sleep.

## Avoid heavy meals before bed

Eating heavy or large meals before bedtime can cause discomfort and disrupt your sleep. Instead, opt for light snacks if you're hungry before bedtime.

## Stay active

Regular exercise can improve sleep quality and help regulate your sleep-wake cycle. Try to incorporate physical activity into your routine on days off.

## Take short naps

Short naps (20-30 minutes) can help alleviate sleepiness and improve alertness during breaks or before shifts, especially for night shift workers.

## Limit alcohol and nicotine

Avoid consuming alcohol or nicotine close to bedtime, as they can disrupt your sleep patterns and lead to poorer sleep quality. Alcohol can initially have a sedative effect, making you feel drowsy and potentially helping you fall asleep faster. However, as the body metabolises alcohol, it can disrupt sleep architecture and lead to poorer sleep quality. Try to finish consuming alcohol at least a few hours before bedtime to give your body time to metabolise it before sleep. Nicotine is a stimulant that can increase alertness and arousal. This stimulating effect can make it harder to fall asleep, particularly if nicotine is consumed close to bed.

## Manage stress

High levels of stress can interfere with your ability to sleep. Practice stress-reduction techniques such as mindfulness, yoga, or journaling to help manage stress levels.

## Communicate with family and friends

Make sure your family and friends understand your work schedule and the importance of uninterrupted sleep. Minimise disruptions during your designated sleep times.

## Seek professional help if needed

If you're experiencing persistent sleep problems or insomnia, consider seeking advice from a sleep specialist or healthcare professional who can provide guidance and treatment options.

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By incorporating these sleep hygiene tips into your routine, you can improve your sleep quality and overall wellbeing as a shift worker. It may take some time to adjust, but prioritising good sleep habits can have significant benefits for your health and performance on the job.

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