

Top Tips for SleepFIT Shift-Working

It's no secret that shift-workers can struggle with sleep, particularly those working the graveyard rotating shifts. This is because shift-works requires you to work against your body-clock which likes predictable, night-time sleeps. Sleep is important for shift-workers, as the better you sleep, the more you improve your health conditions and lower your risk of accidents and being grouchy.

But all is not lost! By looking after your sleep, you can feel more refreshed and alert. Here are some sleep tips just for shift-workers.



Embrace the dark side

Humans sleep best when it's dark. If you have to sleep in the daytime, see what you can do to make your bedroom as dark as possible. Covering windows with block-out blinds or sleeping with an eye-mask will help. If you travel home in the daytime, wearing dark sun-glasses will help your body get ready for sleep.



Protect time for sleep

Many shift-workers sleep fewer hours than people working 9 to 5 jobs. Sometimes this just comes down to life getting in the way. With 7 to 9 hours of sleep important for all elements of your physical and mental health, it's important to protect your time for sleep as much as possible. See if you can plan your week to allow 7 to 9 hours sleep each day/night.



Power nap

Brief naps before or during shifts can help manage fatigue. If you want to wake up feeling refreshed from a nap you need to avoid falling into slow wave sleep. This means you shouldn't nap for more than 15-20 minutes to achieve maximum alertness and energy when you wake up. A short nap will give you an energy burst of around 3 hours.



Look out for your mates

Driving or operating machinery when your brain wants to sleep can increase your risk of accidents and injuries. Keeping an eye out of each other, like car pooling on the way home or working in pairs can help you keep each other safe.



Think before you drink

Caffeine and alcohol can really impact your sleep. Although alcohol may make it feel like it's helping you get to sleep after a busy shift, it actually leads to lighter, more disrupted and unrefreshing sleep. Caffeine can also keep you awake and can stay in your system for hours after drinking. So a coffee before your shift might be great for keeping you alert, see if you can avoid it in the hours leading up to sleep. If you need something to keep you alert, try drinking cold water instead.



Get your team on side

If you're like many shift-workers, it might feel like you're out of step with the rest of the world. Just when you need to sleep, the kids are getting ready for school or your friends want to meet up. It is important to talk to your family about keeping quiet when you're trying to sleep or your friends on arranging catch-ups during times that work with your routine. If your family just can't keep quiet, then ear-plugs or white-noise generators might at least block them out.



Respect the rhythm

Your body has many weird and wonderful ways of knowing when it's time to sleep. Many of these systems work to a 24-hour cycle that is very slow to adapt. This is why you get jet-lag when you travel to different time-zones. Switching between sleeping at night then sleeping in the daytime can confuse your body clock, making it hard to sleep and wake when you want to. Sticking to a regular sleep routine can help you get the best sleep.



Manage midnight feasts

Sticking to healthy meal plans while working shifts can be tricky as you tend to crave fatty and sugary food when you're tired and most 24-hour restaurants are more than happy to cater to this. Your digestion system slows down at night, meaning this extra food is likely to be stored as fat rather than used as energy. Planning for light healthy meals during night-shifts can help you avoid a spreading waistline as well as difficulties sleeping due to indigestion and heartburn.