

Coping with Shift Work

Today's society is on the go 24 hours a day. To compensate for this, the public safety services provided by law enforcement, fire and emergency medical service agencies are not restricted to Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm, but operate around the clock along with the military, hospitals, public utilities and a large portion of the manufacturing industry. The operations of these industries must go on, long after the sun has gone down. In addition to these traditional 24-hour services, many restaurants, grocery stores and gas stations have responded by adding shift workers of their own in order to accommodate the needs of individuals working at night

Shift work may have many advantages to the worker, such as better pay, more daylight hours for recreation and a more flexible schedule for attending school. But shift work is physically demanding. Our bodies have what is called a circadian rhythm, circadian meaning "about a day." The human body expects to sleep at night and to be awake and receive nourishment during daylight hours. Shift work can throw that rhythm off and leave the worker feeling constantly fatigued. Many shift workers also experience gastrointestinal ailments such as heartburn and ulcers. The circadian rhythm makes the night-shift worker feel more awake during the day when they are trying to sleep. Combine this with daytime noises that interfere with the night-shift worker's attempt at sleep and its no wonder that many night-shift workers are suffering.

The circadian rhythm affects how alert a person feels and their ability to perform tasks. In the 9am – 5pm workday, people work during the day when the circadian rhythm is high and sleep at night when the rhythm is low. A person working the night shift is working against the natural rhythms of their body.

It is the responsibility of the shift worker to make sure they feel well rested and get enough sleep to perform their job duties. Most workers need a minimum of six hours of sleep, but for most to perform at their best and to feel refreshed will require more. Many shift workers need two periods of sleep after the night shift, one soon after the shift ends and another in the afternoon before getting ready for the next shift. Taking advantage of an afternoon siesta when your body has a natural tendency to be sleepy may result in feeling more rested for the next night shift. Adding an afternoon nap to regular sleep will help fight drowsiness during the night shift, but the nap should be in addition to, not instead of regular sleep

Schedule at least seven hours in bed. Turn the ringer off on the telephone and disconnect the doorbell. Use earplugs to block out noise. Sleep machines that make

white noise, like the sounds of running water or rainfall, can help you to block out daytime noises that interrupt sound sleep and rest. Enlist the help of your family to ensure that noisy activities such as vacuuming and children playing are kept to a minimum, if not restricted, during your scheduled sleep times. Heavy curtains can help block out sounds as well as aid in keeping your bedroom as dark as possible.

Even though your night shift has just ended and it seems like the rest of the world is just waking up, follow your normal bedtime routine. Bathe, brush your teeth and continue with your normal routine so that your body knows that it is preparing to sleep. Don't forget that a comfortable bed can be synonymous with a good night's sleep (or from the shift worker's point of view a good day's sleep). Invest in a quality mattress that will provide the most comfort to you around the clock. If you must eat before going to sleep, try to keep it light. Heavy foods that can upset your stomach will interfere with getting quality sleep. Avoid alcohol. Alcohol actually disturbs sleep by causing you to sleep lighter and wake up more frequently, even though it can make you fall asleep quicker.

Exercising before going on shift can help the body to produce energy and may aid in shifting the body rhythm to the new work schedule. Twenty minutes of aerobic exercise before a shift should help any worker be more alert and productive. Examples of aerobic exercise include walking, jogging, swimming, and biking. Be careful not to overdo it, as you don't want to be too exhausted to work. Exercising before sleeping may wake your body up and it may make it difficult for you to fall asleep. Eating healthy foods, avoiding too much fat and sugar will help in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and avoid excessive weight gain.

Excessive use of caffeine should be avoided. Caffeine is the most widely used drug in the world and is found in coffee, tea, and many soft drinks and is available in tablet form. It is used more often than any other drug to promote alertness and to fight drowsiness. Used in small amounts, one to three cups of coffee, tea or soft drinks per day, caffeine consumption can be safe. If you are drinking more than five or six cups of a beverage containing caffeine per day, it may make it difficult for you to sleep. Caffeine makes sleep lighter and less satisfying. If you are consuming more than five or six cups per day, it is recommended that you gradually reduce caffeine consumption over a period of days. Cutting down a half-cup to a cup every couple of days should avoid the irritability and headaches that quitting "cold turkey" can bring on. By lowering your caffeine consumption, you should have more restful periods of sleep, making your time on the shift more effective and productive.

The position of public safety Telecommunicator is rewarding, but not without challenges. One of biggest of these challenges is shift work. Taking care of yourself and maintaining a healthy lifestyle is essential to your well-being and success in your career.

Quiz

CDE Article – Coping With Shift Work

Name: _____ Date: _____

Agency: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

1. An entire industry subset has developed to accommodate the needs of night-shift workers.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. The _____ causes the human body to expect to sleep at night and to be awake and receive nourishment during daylight hours.
 - a. Circadian Rhythm
 - b. Shift Work Rhythm
 - c. Aerobic Rhythm
 - d. Healthy Rhythm

3. Most people need a minimum of _____ hours of sleep, but for most to perform at their best and to feel refreshed will require more.
 - a. 2
 - b. 3
 - c. 4
 - d. 6

4. Alcohol will help you sleep better.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Bathing, brushing your teeth and continuing with your normal routine at bedtime will:
 - a. Help your body know that it is preparing to sleep
 - b. Help make sure you get everything done
 - c. Make you more efficient
 - d. Tell others that you are going to bed

6. Exercising before going on shift can help the body to produce energy and may aid in shifting the body rhythm to the new work schedule.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. Five to six cups per day of a beverage containing caffeine is considered safe.
 - a. True
 - b. False