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place according to a natural cycle and any disruption to that cycle can throw a person out of balance.

This natural cycle, or body clock as it is commonly referred to, is called the Circadian rhythm and is responsible for signaling when the body should wake and sleep. The human body signals these actions by releasing or withholding the release of certain hormones, chemicals and neurotransmitters. When sleep patterns are disrupted, such as when a person works night shifts and sleeps during the day, fewer hours of quality sleep are typical consequences.

After a while typical symptoms of insomnia begin to appear including fatigue, diminished ability to concentrate or focus, irritability and feelings of tenseness and depression.

Taking all of these things into account, it should come as no surprise that the incidence of mistakes, accidents and injuries, absenteeism and even fatalities are a lot higher amongst shift work employees. Besides insomnia, shift workers also tend to have more gastrointestinal problems, blood pressure problems and a greater chance of developing other sleep disorders such as sleep apnea.

For the millions of people who do shift work, the benefits are many both for the employee and the employer. However, to sleep disorder experts, shift work has a number of negative implications which can cause problems in the longer term.

Studies have shown that insufficient sleep, an increased likelihood of human error and, contrary to popular belief, decreased productivity are all associated with shift work. The reasons behind these findings is that many key bodily functions take

More people than you might realize participate in shift work. Those in the medical field and in law enforcement can be on duty any time during the day or night. Those working in the mines, in factories, customer service centers as well as those in the field of transportation from taxi drivers and dispatchers to airline pilots and controllers must also be available for work twenty four hours a day, seven days a week.

If you are a shift worker, there are some simple measures that you can take to better adjust. One of the most important steps to take is to

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ensure your sleep area is dark and quiet. If your body thinks that it is night time due to the darkness, it releases a hormone called melatonin, which plays a vital role in the Circadian rhythm because of its ability to initiate sleep. Wherever possible, you should also try to get an adequate amount of sleep - six to eight hours if possible.

If adequate sleep is not possible, try napping during the day. Try to keep disruptions to a minimum when you are sleeping and develop a regular sleeping schedule. Do not drink caffeinated beverages such as coffee for several hours prior to sleep.

Equally important as a darkened sleep environment during daytime sleeping is a bright working environment when working the night shift. You might even ask your employer about the possibility of taking what is sometimes called a 'power nap' during work hours.

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