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The Effects of Shift Work Room

Due to the disruption in the circadian rhythm ([see Circadian Rhythm](#)) and the impairment of the normal sleep pattern, shift work has been shown to have the following effects.

- **Chronic fatigue. Feeling tired is a most common problem among shift workers. Fatigue can also make a person more vulnerable to illness. Fatigue can lead to poor job performance and sagging motivation.**
- **Reduction in concentration and attention span, increased reaction time. This can lead to mistakes and accidents.**
- **Gastro-intestinal and digestive problems. Due to the irregular shifts, in many cases a poor diet results. Lack of access to proper cafeteria services at night or other facilities can lead to "junk food" eating. The fatigue feeling can lead to an increase in consumption of caffeine. ([link to caffeine information.](#)) Poorer eating can lead to indigestion, heartburn and stomachache. It also can lead to weight gain. For some, shift work results in the loss of appetite.**
- **Increased chance of heart attacks. This relates to studies that have shown shift workers have poorer dietary habits, smoke more heavily, and participate in fewer leisure activities.**
- **Disruption in family and social life. Shift work affects the entire family. Due to shift work, family routines can never be fully set. Participation in outside activities such as clubs or sports become complicated. Social isolation can be a real problem for the shift worker.**
- **Safety. Shift work may be a contributing factor to increased injuries and accidents.**
- **Medication. Shift workers tend to take more medicines and drugs to help them sleep and work. It also has been shown that some medications may not have the same effect on the body of a shift worker as it would for someone working a normal day schedule.**

Shift Work Strategies

There are 2 basic levels to address the problems of shift work.

1. Is at the organizational level.

This includes:

- a) **Shift Schedules** ([see Schedules](#))
- b) **Better Facilities** - this would include good lighting and ventilation for all shifts. As an example of a system that is designed to maximize lighting effects (see [Shiftwork Systems Inc.](#))
- c) **Education** - employees are educated about the effects of shift work and ways to cope.

2. Is at the individual level.

This includes:

a) Proper diet and eating patterns.

- maintain eating patterns as regular as possible.
- at night, shift workers should eat light and healthy foods.
- before bed after a night shift, have a moderate breakfast so one will not wake up due to hunger or be kept awake because of fullness.
- limit the intake of caffeine, alcohol and salt.
- avoid as much as possible the use of sleeping pills.

b) Sleep maintenance.

- try to sleep on a set schedule to make sleep during the day easier.
- make sleeping quarters as much like night as possible. Examples include - fans or a "white noise" generator to drown out outside daytime noises. I find two small fans, one on each side of the bed, drowns out most noises. The only noise I never have been able to dampen is the sound of a chain saw.
- use ear plugs and an eye mask.
- darken the room with heavy blinds or curtains. I use a hardboard (like heavy cardboard) cut to fit the window. Darkness of the room is very important as it prevents the sunlight from interfering with your body clock.
- turn off ringer on any nearby phones. Use an answering machine to field any missed calls. One strategy is to use a beeper that only family members know the number for and can contact you if there is an emergency.
(For a unique device which also would serve the purpose of the beeper as mentioned. (see [The Snooz-A-Phone](#)))
- make sure your family and friends understand the importance of your daytime sleep. Let them know what your schedule is.
- take time for quiet relaxation before bed to ensure better daytime sleep.
- relax using breathing or muscle relaxing techniques.
- block out unpleasant thoughts using mental imagery.
- limit your commitments to late in the day or on another day so you are not thinking about what you need to do before trying to sleep.

c) Other Considerations.

- try to adjust your sleep schedule before you move to a new schedule. For example, going to bed 1 or 2 hours later than usual prior to nights.
- increase your physical fitness. Physical fitness can help reduce stress.
- take leisure time seriously.
- work at communicating and keep communication lines open. Let family and friends know how important your daytime sleep is.
- Shift work is not all bad, there are some advantages such as:
 - uncrowded stores.

- able to attend daytime events such as school plays and daytime social clubs.
- able to participate in sports such as golf, tennis or squash, during off peak times.
- normally there is less supervision on night shifts which creates a little more of a relaxed atmosphere.
- working on the off shifts usually allows for more comfortable and casual dress.
- shift workers doing the same job together often form a unique bond.
- some shift workers enjoy the variety in life style that shift work provides.

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