

# Wellness for Shift Workers

## Best Sleep Tips

Our bodies are naturally wired to be awake during daylight and asleep during the dark. Working shift work can throw off your natural circadian rhythms. Long-term sleep deprivation can have a negative impact on your overall health so follow these tips to reduce the negative impact on your body.



### **1. Aim for 8 hours!**

Our bodies need a good 7-8 hours of continuous sleep per day in order to function properly. While you may feel like you are doing ok running on less sleep, this will ultimately catch up with you over time. Put this on priority and you will find that you will be much more productive at work and reduce your chances of getting injured or sick.

### **2. Watch Light Levels**

Expose yourself to light as soon as possible upon waking. This will tell your body that it is time to begin your “day”. At the end of your shift, limit your time in the light to the bare minimum and invest in blackout drapes or a sleep mask for your bedroom so that you can get a good night’s sleep – even when the sun is out!

### **3. Keep a regular wake-sleep schedule!**

While it may be tempting to change your schedule on your days off, this is very taxing on your body. Avoid changing your schedule drastically and try and maintain consistency. If you are on rotating schedules, moving forward instead of backwards is the least disruptive to your sleep-wake schedule (ie: midnights to mornings to afternoons).

### **Other Tips:**

- Keep noise to a minimum while you are sleeping. Turn off your phone and let others in the house know how important it is for you to get your sleep and ask their support in keeping noise to a minimum. White noise in the bedroom is also helpful – this can be as simple as a fan or humidifier or you can invest in a white noise machine as well. Or you can simply invest in a good set of earplugs!
- If you have to work rotating shifts, keep in mind that it is easiest on your body to move forward instead of backwards. Try going from midnights to mornings to afternoons instead of the other way around. Keep in mind your body needs at least a week to get used to a new sleep-wake schedule.
- Be careful with caffeine and sleep aids! You should avoid ingesting any caffeine four hours prior to the end of your shift in order to avoid restlessness and insomnia. Be careful of overreliance on sleep aids – these may be useful in the short-term but can create dependency issues and mask larger problems down the road.

Sources: [www.sparkpeople.com](http://www.sparkpeople.com), [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), [www.besthealthmag.com](http://www.besthealthmag.com)

## Best Nutrition Tips

Many shift workers have issues with weight gain and obesity. This is largely in part to excessive calorie intake and poor food choices. Make a commitment to yourself and your health and follow these tips to avoid long-term health issues:



### **1. Brown Bag It!**

It can be hard to find a good salad or a bowl of oatmeal at 1am! Avoid relying on vending machines and fast food and prepare a healthy meal and healthy snack options to bring with you. This will make it easier to stick to a healthy diet and you will find that eating right will give you the energy you need to make it through your shift!

### **2. Stay Hydrated!**

Dehydration can leave you feeling tired. Keep a water bottle close by and drink regularly throughout your shift. Remember, by the time you feel thirsty, your body is likely already dehydrated!

### **3. Watch Portion Sizes & Eat for Fuel, not Fun!**

Remember to treat food as fuel and not entertainment. Many shift workers eat to break the monotony of their shift and this can result in intake of excess calories. Try having a large meal prior to work and then a light lunch and snacks to get you through the rest of your shift!

### **Try these tips as well....**

- Make balanced food choices: lots of fruits & vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy and lean meats.
- Protein & complex carbohydrates are great sources of energy during a long shift. Combine them to feel full and stay energized longer! Try half a whole-grain bagel and some peanut butter or some fruit and some string cheese.
- Stay active! Schedule physical activity into your life to stay strong and reduce your chances of injury at work. Ideally, you should work out before your shift and not afterwards to avoid restlessness and insomnia when it's time for bed. When you start feeling groggy at work, it's a great time to run a few flights of stairs or do some stretching or jumping jacks. Just get your heart rate up!
- Maintain your relationships! Make a phone date with your family at least once per shift to check in and stay connected. Before they go to bed or when they wake up in the morning may be the best times for this.
- Remember the power of music! If your employer allows it, bring your own music in and use it to keep yourself motivated and to avoid boredom while at work.

Sources: [www.sparkpeople.com](http://www.sparkpeople.com), [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), [www.besthealthmag.com](http://www.besthealthmag.com)