

# EAP Educates: Adjusting to shift work – Part 1. Eating habits, keeping fit and managing family interactions

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## Some Tips for Good Eating

Irregular eating habits make shift workers susceptible to stomach and digestive complaints. Weight gain can also be a problem as many shift workers eat during the day and snack all night just to keep them awake.

### Try to do the following:

- Schedule one meal with your family each day.
- Start your “day” (no matter what time it is) with high protein (meat/fish) and slowly shift to carbohydrates (bread/pasta) as bedtime approaches.
- Establish a normal meal schedule no matter what hour to work (normally this is 3 meals a day)
- Do not eat a meal high in protein within several hours of bedtime. Protein rich foods perk up the brain.
- Schedule eating patterns to change along with your work and sleep schedule, but be consistent on each schedule.
- Before going to bed, prepare a proper lunch for the time of day you expect to work – this will eliminate last minute problems if you still need to sleep.

### Some more tips:

- Your first meal after sleeping should include protein. Since protein is difficult to digest, choose light protein right before and during work. Protein intake should stop a few hours before your bedtime.

- **Heavy Protein**

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- **Beef, Pork, Eggs, Lamb, High fat cheese**
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- **Light Protein**

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- **Chicken, fish, low fat dairy, cooked beans, peas, lentils**
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- Work time snacks can include: low fat dairy products, fruit or juice, popcorn, granola, plain cookies, pretzels, baked crackers, dried fruit.
- Do not take in caffeine during the second half of your shift.
- Other hard to digest foods include spicy, fried, rich or fatty foods.



## Some tips for keeping fit

Your physical fitness plays an important part in shift work adjustment. You need to make the time for some aerobic exercise that will boost your energy levels and increase your stamina. Aerobic exercise includes walking, running, cycling, swimming etc. Exercise to get your heart rate up.

The best time to exercise is after you've just woken up. Exercise raises the body temperature and helps you to feel more alert. Be sure to warm up properly and consult your doctor if you are over 40 years old before starting an exercise programme.

## Some tips for family relationships

One of the biggest problems caused by shift work is the strain it puts on the family relationships. Working shifts that do not match your family's routine make it difficult for you to fulfill your role as a mother or father properly. Difficulties at home or in our personal lives affect our work performance; moods and even our ability to sleep and problems at work cause us to be irritable and moody at home. In order to ensure shift work causes minimal disruption to your family relations, TRY the following:

- Discuss with your family how your shifts affect you and them – good communication is essential if you are to work out compromises that everyone will support.
- Let your family and friends know how much you need their support – don't assume they know what you need.
- Plan quality time together – look for opportunities and plan ahead – make the time.
- Try and have at least one meal together everyday – eating together brings ALL the family together and provides a good opportunity to communicate with each other.
- Discuss family security concerns and come up with safely plans when you are working nights – if you are worrying about your family's safety when you are at work, you will stress yourself out.
- Plan personal time with your spouse – don't let other responsibilities take priority over your relationship.
- Organise and participate in group activities – it can help you feel less isolated from the rest of the world.
- Try not to take out your stress on your family – often your irritability and fatigue will be as a result of lack of sleep. Rather try and improve your sleeping conditions.

Part 2 next month.....

**CONTACT THE EAP FOR MORE ASSISTANCE OR INFORMATION ON MANAGING SHIFT WORK.**