

# EAP Educates: Adjusting to shift work – Part 2. Dealing with Sleep

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Successful adjustment to working shifts requires persistence in doing things right and knowing what your limitations are.

## Some tips to help you sleep

### Before going to sleep

**Relax:** have the same before bedtime routine no matter what time you go to sleep. Do something you find relaxing until you feel tired enough to sleep. A consistent 15-30 minute pre-sleep “ritual” such as a warm bath/shower or reading the newspaper will help signal your body to prepare for sleep.

**Avoid caffeinated drinks for 4 hours before bedtime.** Sleeping with caffeine in your body causes light, disturbed and fragmented sleep.

**Avoid alcohol before bedtime:** Alcohol may help you fall asleep faster, but it will cause disturbed sleep later.

**Do not rely on sleeping pills:** This is not a healthy way to cope, and they can become addictive.

**Consider the effects of nicotine:** Nicotine is a stimulant and can prevent you from falling asleep. It can also cause an addictive reaction.

- In the daytime, the earlier you go to sleep, the better. Your body temperature and metabolism increase during the day and eventually reach a point that is incompatible with sleep. This is why one of the frequent complaints is awakening too soon and being unable to return to sleep.
- For good daytime sleep, you also need co-operation from family members. It is important to communicate your needs to them to avoid misunderstanding, disappointment and frustration. Also listen to their needs.
- Eat lightly before the end of the shift. Foods that are heavy in protein, fat or spices, can make sleep more difficult.

### Some other good tips

- Try to sleep for long periods.
- Avoid inconsistent napping. Napping confuses your body rhythm and can delay the time it takes to fall asleep. It can also cause disturbed sleep. If you do nap as part of the sleep strategy, do it consistently so that your body has a routine.
- Do not force yourself to go to sleep – if you do not feel sleepy, get up and do something until you feel sleepy. Make sure you get up at the same time; a regular wake up time helps reset your body clock and leads to a more regular onset of sleep.



- Allow adequate time for sleeping each day, no matter what shift you are working. Do not trade daytime sleep for other activities.
- Prepare yourself for shift changes. If you rotate shifts, on days off between shift changes, let your sleep naturally drift one or two hours later each day. Do this by staying up 1-2 hours later each night and then sleeping for an hour or 2 later each day. This way your sleep schedule is already partially adjusted when you start the next shift. Remember to be consistent.
- As you get older, it becomes difficult to stay awake all night and sleep during the day, so it is important to develop consistent sleep habits as early as possible.

### **Your sleeping environment**

You will sleep better during the day if you simulate nighttime sleeping conditions, as that is when your body is used to sleeping.

- Sleep in a dark room – use dark shades, heavy lined curtains, eye mask, black plastic taped to the window frame etc.
- Make sure the room is cool – use a fan.
- Eliminate noise – insulate the room – create a “sound barrier” with low-level noise.
- Work out a sleep schedule with our family so that you do not get interrupted or wake up if they make a noise in other areas of the house.
- Tell friends not to visit when you are sleeping.
- Try using foam earplugs.

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