

WELLBEING SERIES

SLEEP PRACTICES FOR SHIFT WORKERS

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Abstract

Background

In this wellbeing series we present practical advice for prehospital care providers, responders, and other shift workers. These articles are produced by experts in their field. Many of these topics were presented at the Irish College of Paramedics Wellbeing Symposium in University College Cork in May 2019.

Keywords: paramedic, wellbeing, prehospital, health.

Optimise your sleep during night shift

Before your night shift

- Taper your sleep and wake times to the new schedule by rising 2 hours later each day and going to bed 2 hours later.
- Take a nap before your shift to reduce sleepiness at work.
- If you are a “lark”: try a long nap for up to 3 hrs to reduce your sleep debt.
- If you are an “owl”: you will find it more difficult to sleep in the afternoon but try at least a 15-20 min nap before you get ready for work.

Staying alert during work

The 3 factors to focus on are:

Caffeine

Caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee can be helpful stimulants to promote attention in the first 2 hours of shift.

Light exposure

Seek out bright light before and during the early part of night shift. Consider bright light therapy only until 2-3 am.

Nutrition

If you have the same shift for at least a few days, eat a meal or a snack at the same time each night to promote regular body cycles.

Protect your sleep after night shift

Light exposure

- Avoid exposure to blue light as blue light inhibits melatonin production. Use blue light blocking glasses.
- Maintain a light tight bedroom. No equipment in standby mode. Eliminate light coming under the door.
- Go to bed early after night shift.

Eliminate noise disruption

- Reduce exposure to potential noise disturbance.
- Kids in the house can be a source of noise disturbance.
- Ensure your family knows you are sleeping.
- Avoid having a clock or alarm clock where you can see it during your sleep time.
- Follow the same routine to prepare for bed on day or night shifts.

Recovering between shifts

- Stay physically active
- If you are trying to return to a natural day shift pattern, remember that bright light boosts alertness. Bright light therapy glasses are useful.

Sleep hygiene habits

- Maintain a consistent bed time and wake time.
- Avoid blue light (from smartphones, tablets, computers, e-readers etc) for 2 hours before bed time.
- Keep your bedroom dark, quiet and cool.
- Avoid caffeine for 8 hours.
- Avoid heavy meals closer to bed time.
- Avoid alcohol within 3 hours of bed time.
- Avoid exercise and hot showers within 3 hours of bed time.
- If you worry about things, rationalise and consider journaling.