

▶ About us

▶ Pay & contracts

▶ Planning your workforce

▶ Recruitment & retention

▶ Employment policy & practice

▼ Health, work and well-being

▶ Latest news

▶ NHS well-being at work

▼ Health and safety

▶ Health and safety essential guide

▶ Prevention of sharps injuries framework agreement

▶ Statutory and mandatory training

▶ Occupational Health and Safety Standards

▶ Health and Safety Offences Act 2008

▶ Tackling slip and trip risks

▶ Night Shift Work

▶ Working with radiation in the NHS

▶ Mental health and stress

▶ Implementing Boorman

▶ POSHH

▶ Staff health and well-being

▶ Volunteers and volunteering

▶ Musculoskeletal disorders

▶ Open Your Mind

▶ Domestic violence

▶ Flu

▶ Monthly Updates

▶ NICE guidelines

▶ Olympics 2012

▶ The Public Health Responsibility Deal

▶ NHS reform

▶ Managing the transition

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Night Shift Work

26/05/2010

Information and guidance concerning night shift working.

Working the Night Shift

Preparation, survival and recovery

Working at night is an essential part of providing a comprehensive 24 hour service to patients in the NHS. Changes to working patterns as a result of implementing the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) mean that many staff now work full 11-13 hour night shifts as an integral part of their rotas.



Working at night, whatever the shift pattern, can have implications for patients and staff as it increases the risks of poor decision making or even mistakes.

The Royal College of Physicians has recognised the possible problems this may cause and has produced a

guide, *Working the night shift: preparation, survival and recovery*. The guide, which is suitable for all staff who work night shifts, sets out simple advice on how to prepare to work at night and includes guidance on managing sleep at home, staying as alert and refreshed as possible while on duty and how to recover from working nights in the most efficient and effective way.

The guide, *Working the night shift*, is available to download as a free PDF from the Royal College of Physicians website.

Main areas of advice covered by the guidance are:

Preparing for the night shift:

- Build a successful normal sleep routine
- Get extra sleep before working the first night shift
- Take a two hour afternoon sleep before coming on duty

Surviving the night shift

- Take 20 to 45 minute short naps to counteract fatigue
- Use exposure to light to improve your alertness during the night
- Do not miss proper meals when working at night
- Use caffeine cautiously, if at all, as it is a stimulant

Recovering from the night shift

- If planning a long drive home, consider if this is wise
- On getting home, try to sleep immediately
- Develop a routine for sleeping during the daytime
- Keep your sleep debt to a minimum.

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External links...

- [Royal College of Physicians Website](#)
PDF of Working the Night Shift document