

What is fatigue and who is at risk?

Fatigue is mental or physical exhaustion that stops a person from being able to function normally. It is mainly caused by a lack of sleep or poor quality sleep. Therefore, you are more likely to be at risk of fatigue if you:

- are a shift worker
- work extended hours
- have irregular and unpredictable working hours.

If you fit into any of these categories, you may benefit from the tips in this brochure.



Important information for shift workers

If your employer requires you to work outside of standard working hours, they are obliged to protect your health and safety from any adverse effects. Your employer is also required to consult with workers when introducing changes to the workplace that could affect your health and safety, including changes to shifts.

If you do experience adverse health effects from shift work, you should speak to your supervisor, workplace health and safety representative or workplace health and safety officer about your concerns.



Managing fatigue: stay healthy, stay safe

Fatigue can affect your health and increase your chances of having a workplace accident. However there are ways you can reduce fatigue. One way to reduce fatigue is to look after yourself – ensure you get enough sleep, eat well, take precautions when driving and stay physically fit.

This brochure provides some practical tips for shift workers on how to stay healthy and reduce fatigue, in order to improve your health and reduce the risk of a workplace accident.

Further information

For further information on managing fatigue contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland:

Website: www.dir.qld.gov.au

Telephone: 1300 369 915

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Managing fatigue: handy tips for shift workers

If you work outside of normal hours you may have:

- more trouble getting sufficient sleep
- poorer quality sleep.

This brochure is designed to help workers reduce fatigue in their every day life.



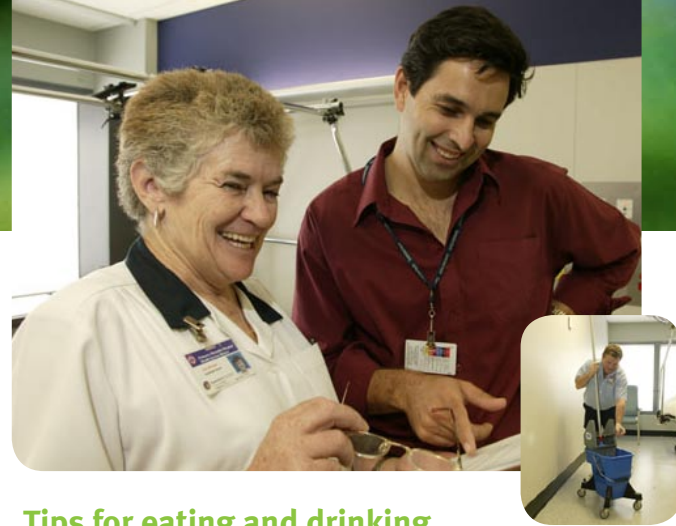
Tips for sleeping

It is important that shift workers get as close to the average amount of required daily sleep as possible, which is around seven to eight hours of continuous sleep each day.

Human beings are day-oriented. We are designed to work during the day and sleep at night. Also, there is more light and usually more noise during the day than at night – so your quality of sleep is likely to be poorer during the day than at night. It is therefore a good idea to do some forward planning to ensure your sleeping conditions are as favourable as possible.

The following tips may help you avoid unwanted disruptions while trying to sleep during the day:

- use blinds or curtains with backing to reduce the level of light in your bedroom during the day – using heavy curtains and sound insulation on doors and windows can also reduce noise levels
- cool conditions can help in getting to sleep and staying asleep
- inform relatives and friends of your work schedule and sleep times to avoid unwanted disruptions
- use an answering machine, or turn the phone down to help minimise disturbances
- develop ways of ‘unwinding’ after the afternoon or night shift e.g. take a walk or watch some television
- take a shower or a relaxing bath before going to bed
- go through all the normal rituals of going to bed as you would before a normal sleeping night
- avoid having a television in the bedroom
- don’t get upset if you can’t sleep straight away. Reading the paper or listening to music may help, but remember that rest in itself is important
- be cautious with using sleeping tablets, which may appear useful in the short-term, but can actually be quite harmful to health in the long-term.



Tips for eating and drinking

If you eat food and drink before going to bed it can affect your sleep quality. The timing of meals and the quality of foods you eat can affect your sleep, and may lead to digestive complaints such as heartburn, constipation and indigestion.

The following tips can help you prevent digestive complaints and may help you sleep better.

When to eat and drink:

- wherever possible, keep to daytime eating patterns
- when working a night shift try having two meals at regular times and a light meal in the middle of the night shift
- consider having your largest daily meal during the day
- do not have a big meal or drink too much liquid before sleeping
- eat a meal before 1am as the effects of digesting a meal can decrease alertness in the second part of the night shift. It is better to eat before becoming fatigued at night.

What to eat and drink:

- alcohol lowers the quality of sleep and overloads the bladder. It is recommended that you do not consume alcohol in the last few hours prior to sleeping
- avoid drinks which contain caffeine (such as tea, coffee or cola) in the last few hours prior to sleeping
- eat light, healthy food that is easy to digest.

Tips for driving

Driving while tired is a major killer on the roads. Fatigue slows your reaction time and affects your scanning ability and information processing skills. Driving between the hours of midnight to dawn is especially dangerous, and night shift workers should consider these increased dangers when driving during these times.

The following driving precautions can help you manage fatigue:

- avoid driving when you are tired
- avoid using the heater as it can make you feel drowsy. In cool conditions direct warmth to your feet, and open the window a little to allow fresh air on your face
- keep your mind active by listening to the radio while driving
- make the vehicle as windy, noisy and uncomfortable as possible
- share the drive with other people.

It is important to note that these methods only have an effect for approximately 15 minutes. Therefore, whenever you are driving a vehicle and begin to feel fatigued (i.e. find it difficult not to fall asleep while driving), turning up the radio or relying on cold air should only be used as a method to stay awake until you find a safe place to pull over and rest.



Tips for health and physical fitness

It is recommended that you consult your doctor before beginning shift work if you:

- are on regular medication (e.g. insulin for diabetes or antidepressants)
- have a chronic medical condition (e.g. asthma or epilepsy).



Shift workers tend to have more health-related problems than day workers. You should seek medical advice if you experience:

- depression
- sleeping problems
- heart problems
- indigestion or other stomach or bowel problems.

You should also report these effects to your health and safety representative.

As health and fitness are contributing factors to fatigue, it is also important for shift workers to maintain a good level of physical fitness. Making an effort to do physical activity during your leisure time will contribute to your overall health and help you manage fatigue.