SLEEP AND SHIFT WORK

Many jobs require people to work non-traditional schedules that are outside of the standard 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. In fact, more than 15 million Americans now work evenings, nights or other irregular hours. Working irregular schedules can wreak havoc on your sleep. When you work at night and sleep during the day, your body’s internal clock has a difficult time adjusting because light is a cue to be awake, while dark tells your body to sleep. But there are things you can do to ensure you get good sleep, whatever time you go to bed.

WHY FOCUS ON SLEEP?
Sleep, like eating well and exercising, is important for good health. Sleep impacts our ability to learn new tasks, perform at our best, take what the day throws at us and stay healthy over time. Those with poor sleep are at increased risk for motor vehicle accidents and workplace injuries. People who don’t get a good night’s sleep are at greater risk for obesity, heart disease, gastrointestinal diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression. Consider trying some of the following tips to improve your sleep when you are working the night shift.

Stay Alert on the Job:
- Be active during your breaks — stand up, stretch, go for a walk or take the stairs.
- Take short naps if permitted and as appropriate.
- Limit caffeine to the start of your shift so you can stay alert during your shift but also fall asleep easily after your shift ends.
- Take care of tedious and boring tasks earlier in your shift when you are less likely to be tired.

On the Way Home:
- Wear dark sunglasses to block out bright lights.
- Avoid consuming caffeine. Coffee, tea, chocolate and even some medications contain caffeine.
- Avoid alcohol in the hours before bed. A nightcap may seem like a relaxing way to end the day, but it will disrupt your sleep. Studies find that drinking close to bedtime will help you fall asleep and achieve a deeper sleep during the first part of the night but also will result in a rebound effect that leaves you more likely to wake up and get lower-quality sleep. Interestingly, alcohol is found to have a stronger negative impact on women’s sleep than men’s.

At Bedtime:
- Develop a quiet bedtime routine. Whether you prepare for bed with a warm bath, journaling, reading a book or listening to quiet music, a regular routine will help you wind down and let go of the day.
- Avoid screen time for an hour before bed. Lights from the TV, computer or cell phone stimulate your brain and make it difficult to get high-quality sleep. While the TV is used by many to provide white noise, its changes in volume make it detrimental to sleep quality.
- Leave work at work — reading an upsetting work email before bed will leave you staring at the ceiling long after your bedtime. Set a cut-off time at least an hour before bed and tackle work-related tasks first thing after a good rest.
- Protect your sleep. Turn off your cell phone and restrict any interruptions the same way you would if you were sleeping at night. You wouldn’t take a call or run an errand at 2 a.m., so don’t do it at 2 p.m. if that is in the middle of your sleep time.
- Make sure family members know when you will be resting and that you are not to be disturbed unless it is an emergency.
- Avoid large meals right before bed. Try to eat your last meal of the day at least two to three hours before going to bed. If you like to enjoy a snack before bed, consider something light, such as fruit or vegetables, string cheese, yogurt or plain popcorn.
SETTING THE STAGE FOR SLEEP IN THE BEDROOM

It is recommended that adults get seven to nine hours of sleep per night. However, working irregular hours can make this difficult. Sunlight, family activity and outside noise can interfere with your sleep. Your bedroom setup can help you get a good night’s sleep.

- Reserve your bedroom for sleep only. Do not use your bedroom as a place to eat, work, pay bills, etc.
- Do not allow children or pets to sleep in bed with you. They can move around a lot and disrupt your sleep. Pets can also trigger allergies.
- Make like a vampire and block out sources of light. Keep electronics out of the bedroom since their glare can keep you from achieving a deep sleep. Purchase darkening blinds or shades to block out sunlight. Consider using a sleep mask.
- Keep a cool temperature in the bedroom. Setting the thermostat to 65 degrees Fahrenheit helps cool down the body and prepare it for sleep. You can help cool the room by closing the blinds or curtains to block sunlight, using a fan to push out warm air and circulate cooler air, and also purchasing bedding that is made from breathable fabric, like cotton.
- Earplugs can help block out noise. However, some people find that light background noise is soothing. A white-noise machine plays calming sounds (e.g., ocean waves, rainfall, birds chirping) to help lull you to sleep.
- Ensure you’re getting proper support from your mattress and pillows. Replace the mattress if it’s more than eight years old. If pillows have become lumpy or lost their shape, toss them in the dryer with a tennis ball to fluff them up or replace the pillows altogether.
- Make the bed every day and banish chaos. A properly made bed is much more appealing to climb into than a bed with rumpled blankets. Likewise, a messy bedroom can cause stress. Keeping your bedroom orderly and neat is more inviting for sleep.
- Remove distractions, such as the TV or computer.
- If you have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you go back to bed. If you’re lying awake worrying about tasks you need to accomplish, write a to-do list to help you feel more organized and calm your mind.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Your member website also offers additional resources. The web address is located on the back of your insurance ID card. Log in or register and select the Health and Wellness tab to find tools and resources to help you overcome the challenges that may be keeping you from getting quality sleep.

For additional support or questions, please call a Blues On CallSM health coach at 1-888-BLUE-428.