

ADVICE TO STAFF WORKING NIGHT SHIFT

It is a well known fact that when it gets dark, your body releases melatonin and you get sleepy. Agency nurses can often neglect their own health while working night shifts so SOS Medical Staffing have compiled a few tips which may help improve staff's wellbeing.

Below are a few tips and advice to ensure you stay as healthy as possible whilst undertaking night shifts on behalf of SOS Medical Staffing. It is important to allow your 'body clock' adjust and plan a sleep schedule to make night shifts as easy as possible.

Prior to starting your night shift, try to sleep for as long as you can during the day before. Some nurses find it helpful to stay up late the night before and lie in the following day, although, understandably this is not always possible. An alternative to a lay in would be a short nap prior to the start of your shift, to facilitate the reduction of effects of fatigue.

MIND have some useful tips on improving the quality of sleep you have, listed below:

- *Try different temperature, light and noise levels to see what works for you.*
- *Lots of people find dark, quiet and cool environments best, but everyone is different.*
- *If you can't sleep in darkness, try keeping a light or bedside lamp switched on.*
- *If silence makes it harder to sleep, listen to music, nature sounds, a podcast or the radio.*
- *You might find it helpful to try different bedding – for example, a warmer or cooler duvet, or a different pillow.*
- *If you're affected by issues with a partner – for example, snoring or problems sharing a bed – the [British Snoring & Sleep Apnoea Association](#) has information on its website and a helpline.*

Other lifestyle suggestions from MIND are:

Try to do some physical activity

Physical activity can help you sleep, including gentle physical activity. It can be particularly helpful to be active outdoors. Some people find they need to stop any physical activity a few hours before going to sleep. Our pages on [physical activity and mental health](#) have more information.

Spend time outside

Being outside in green space can help you relax and improve your wellbeing. Spending time in natural light can also be helpful for your sleep. Our pages on [nature and mental health](#) have more information.

Please see the link below for further information on sleep tips from MIND.

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/tips-to-improve-your-sleep

Nutrition

Caffeinated drinks can be of help if used wisely, however be aware that too much caffeine can cause upset stomach, headaches and muscle shakes. Ideally, you should stop drinking caffeine 6 hours prior to your 'bed time' to lessen any impact the caffeine will have on your sleep pattern.

Try to adopt a 'grazing' approach towards eating whilst working. 'Little and often' meaning staff consume smaller, more frequent light meals that include raw salads, fruit, nuts and vegetables.

Choose balanced meals that include high protein, complex carbohydrate and low fat foods. It is worth preparing meals in advance so you don't have to cook after your shift.

Optimise your hydration. Drink water throughout the shift to reduce risk of headaches and drowsiness.

Health

Assess your own health, especially in these times of Covid-19. DO NOT undertake any shifts if you are feeling unwell. Consider if you are 'FIT TO WORK' rather than 'SICK'. Remember, for registered nurses, it is your PIN that is at stake if you make an error due to working whilst knowing you are not in optimum health.

Be especially careful when driving to and from your shift. Driving whilst tired is incredibly dangerous. If necessary, and you are able to, get someone to collect you if you are feeling tired.

During the night shift

As an agency nurse you may start on a ward that you are unfamiliar with. Request orientation to the unit, and emergency procedures, resuscitation trolley location and bleep system.

Communicate with your patients if it is safe to do so and time permits. This often makes patients more receptive.

Should you experience quieter periods during your shift, find something to keep your brain active to prevent drowsiness. While night shifts can typically be slower, keeping your body moving will keep your blood flowing and mind awake. Try not clock-watch, as this can increase fatigue and make the night feel longer. Talk to your co-workers, share tips for surviving the night shift

Lastly, but by no means least.....PUT YOUR PHONE ON SILENT. There's nothing worse than being woken mid-day by someone wanting to sell you a new energy supplier!

References/Links/Further tips & Support

www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/tips-to-improve-your-sleep

www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/Joining-NHSP/Latest-News/Detail?Id=Seven-ways-to-deal-with-night-shifts

www.registerednursing.org/articles/night-shift-nurse-tips