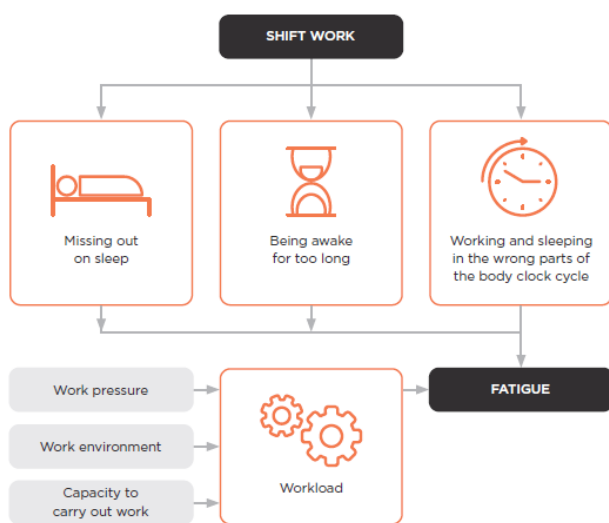


Tip sheet

Shift work

Shift work can challenge both our physical and mental health. In fact, according to the Sleep Health Foundation Australia¹, 'people who work shifts don't sleep as well as those who work set hours during the day'.

So why does this happen? One reason could be that an unpredictable schedule makes finding a work-life balance more difficult. Working more nights can also lead to a lack of sunlight, which helps our bodies regulate mood and sleep. Secondly, the types of jobs that offer shift work tend to disproportionately include higher-risk situations and more interaction with the public. These pressures can build over time, leading to a negative impact on our mental health.



Source: Sleep/Wake Research Centre, School of Health Sciences, College of Health, Massey University.

The good news is, you're not alone, and there is always something you can do to help minimise the effects of shift work on your wellbeing.

Here are some helpful tips

Prioritise sleep

Quality sleep is crucial – especially for shift workers who often sleep during the day. Create a dark, quiet and cool sleep environment using blackout curtains and earplugs to minimise disruptions. If your schedule changes frequently, try to maintain a regular sleep pattern as much as possible, even on days off, to stabilise your circadian rhythm.

Try to get at least 7-9 hours of sleep every 24 hours. If you are struggling, consult your doctor and see if they have any advice to help you sleep.

Stay physically active

Incorporate regular exercise into your routine, regardless of your shift hours. Physical activity boosts mood and energy levels. Short, daily exercises like walking or stretching during breaks can be beneficial. Choose a time that aligns with your schedule to ensure consistency, such as exercising before or after your shift.



Healthy eating habits

Nutrition is vital for sustaining energy and focus during shifts. Opt for balanced meals rich in proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. For night shifts, eat lightly during the night and have a more substantial meal when you wake up. Avoid heavy, greasy foods before sleep to prevent digestive discomfort, and stay hydrated while limiting your caffeine and sugar intake.

Build a support network

Shift work can be isolating. Cultivate strong relationships with family, friends and colleagues. Share your schedule with them to foster understanding and support. Engage in social activities during your off hours to maintain a sense of normalcy and connection, and try to synchronise free time with loved ones whenever possible.

Mindfulness and relaxation

Practice mindfulness techniques such as meditation, deep breathing or yoga to manage stress and improve mental clarity. Schedule regular relaxation activities like reading or listening to music after your shift to unwind. These practices can help shift workers maintain a positive mindset despite the challenges of irregular hours.

¹ <https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/sleep-disorders/shift-work>

Contact

0508 664 981
assistance@vitae.co.nz
www.vitae.co.nz