

## **Sleep** during the COVID-19 pandemic Tips for shift workers



Shift work is any work pattern that requires you to be awake when you would normally be asleep if you were free to choose your own sleep schedule. Essentially, any work pattern that requires you to change your preferred sleep/wake pattern is shift work. This includes many different types of work, including early starts, late finishes and night work.

If you are a shift worker, you may have found that your sleep is affected during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. It may be shorter and of poorer quality, particularly if you are having to constantly share your house with others in your bubble or if you are feeling stressed or worried. The following tips provide some suggestions for shift workers to support your sleep and waking functioning.



**Have a conversation about sleep to make it a household priority** If you are having to constantly share a household with others in your bubble, you may have found there are challenges to getting enough, good quality sleep while working shift work. Noise and other disruptions from household members while you are trying sleep may mean your sleep is shorter, broken and of poorer quality. A good strategy is to have a conversation with everyone in your household about sleep to ensure everyone is working together to support getting the best sleep they can. Our **COVID-19 information sheets** are a good starting point – you will be able to find tips relevant to everyone in your household.

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### Try to start a series of shifts fully rested

The effects of missing out on sleep build up day after day and are greater the more sleep you miss out on. Try to be as well rested as you can be at the start of a series of shifts so that you do not quickly build up a sleep debt. You may not get as much sleep as you would like while working shift work, particulary during these challenging times. This means it is important to try to get enough, good quality sleep on your days off work so you are well prepared for your next set of shifts. Our **General Sleep and Circadian Health Information** sheet includes tips on how much sleep we need and ways to support getting enough, good quality sleep.

### When working shift work, try to get as much sleep in 24 hours as you would on a day off



While working shift work, particularly night shift work, there may be challenges to getting enough, good quality sleep. It is normal to wake earlier than you would like or to have broken sleep. Even while working shift work, it is best to aim to get as much sleep in 24 hours as you normally would on a day off. This may mean you sleep in two chunks – you may have a main sleep period and then a booster nap to make up your daily sleep quota. Talking to others in your household about your sleep plan can help you to achieve enough, good quality sleep.

### It's ok to nap if you need them



Having a nap can be a great way to increase the amount of sleep you get in a 24-hour period. Having a nap can also reduce the amount of time you are awake between sleep periods, helping you to stay safe and work effectively during your shift and importantly, helping you to get home safely during your commute. Longer naps (60 mins or more) provide benefits that last for longer. Sometimes naps can leave you feeling groggy and sluggish. This is normal and usually passes within 15 minutes or so. However, it is important that you don't have a long nap if you need to wake and immediately carry out a safety-critical task like driving. The groggy feeling can mean you aren't safe on the road. To reduce the chances of feeling groggy on waking, keep your nap short (40 minutes or less). Set an alarm and/or ask someone else in your household to be your back-up alarm, in case you do not wake.



### Create good sleep habits to get the best sleep you can

Try to create good sleep habits for your work days and your days off so that you can get the best quality sleep you can. Our **General Sleep and Circadian Health Information** sheet includes nine tips on ways to support getting good quality sleep. If you have found that you are feeling stressed or worried during these uncertain times, you may like to read our **Sleep and Mental Health** information sheet.

Prioritising our sleep while working shift work can help ensure we work safely and effectively, and can reduce fatigue and fatigue-related errors. Good quality sleep also helps us to make the most of our time away from work, and keep physically and mentally healthy.

You can find our other information sheets on our website www.sleepwake.ac.nz.



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