



**Superior  
Healthcare  
Group**

# Night Shift Working

Employee Guide

# WORKING AT NIGHTS

## CIRCADIAN RHYTHM

Our internal body clock generates circadian rhythms that regulate our sleep and wake cycles over 24 hours. It is strongly influenced by the natural cycles of light and dark.

Working at night involves fighting against our natural circadian rhythms, and we try to be awake and alert when we are naturally programmed to be asleep.

When we act against our circadian rhythms, we feel tired and function less effectively. Working at night can cause sleep deprivation and fatigue, and lead to accumulating sleep debt.

A fundamental aspect of being a successful night worker is learning how to manage your daytime sleep as well as managing fatigue at night so that you can keep your sleep debt to a minimum.

## CONSEQUENCES OF NOT GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

Studies have shown that moderate sleep deprivation (equivalent to being awake for 16-18 hours) can have the same effect on reaction time as being at the legal blood alcohol limit for safe driving.

Therefore, when you are sleep-deprived, you will be more prone to making mistakes and even falling asleep on duty, which places your client at safety risk.

You may also become less able to judge your own performance and may not even realise you are making mistakes.

The consequences of making mistakes and falling asleep on duty can be very severe to you or the client, therefore it is vital that you manage a healthy routine.



# CONSEQUENCES OF FALLING ASLEEP

The consequences of not getting enough sleep before your night shift, and as a result making mistakes and falling asleep on duty, can be very severe to the client and healthcare professionals, and the potential impact could extend beyond general care concerns.

In particular, clients with complex care needs require vigilant monitoring overnight. For example, if they are unable to maintain their airways independently, or if they have silent seizures. Therefore, any instances of them being left unobserved could be fatal.

## IMPACT ON CLIENTS

### Safety:

Our clients fully rely on our teams for continuous care, monitoring and timely interventions. Falling asleep whilst looking after a vulnerable individual increases the risk of incidents, including delayed medical care intervention, and can lead to adverse events, especially for clients with severe and critical medical conditions.

### Compromised Delivery of Care:

Timely and appropriate care is critical to our clients. Falling asleep may result in delayed administration of medications, missed treatments, and a lack of attention to changes in the client's condition, potentially negatively impacting the client's condition or/and their recovery process.

### Emotional Impact:

Clients may feel unsafe, anxious, or neglected if they or their families observe anyone asleep whilst on duty. This can negatively impact the client and their family's trust in the team and the Company.

### Trust and Relationship Impact:

Clients and their families often develop close bonds with their healthcare teams. Falling asleep may erode the trust built over time, leading to increased anxiety and emotional distress for the client, their family. Maintaining a strong therapeutic relationship is crucial for the overall wellbeing of our clients.

Family Concerns: Clients' families rely on healthcare teams to provide continuous support and vigilance to their loved ones. Falling asleep may raise concerns among family members about the quality of care, potentially leading to dissatisfaction and strained relationships with the healthcare team and the company.

## IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE TEAMS

### **Compromised Care Delivery:**

Falling asleep on duty may result in a lack of or delayed responses to emergencies, missed medication administrations, and incomplete documentation, all of which can negatively impact our clients' wellbeing, sometimes with the most severe outcomes. This can be extremely distressing to the team members involved, and can lead to serious professional outcomes, including dismissal from employment, and referrals to regulatory bodies (CQC, NMC or DBS).

### **Clinical Deterioration:**

Clients may experience progressive or rapid clinical changes that demand attention. Falling asleep during night shifts puts healthcare teams at risk of missing subtle signs of clinical deterioration, potentially leading to missed or delayed interventions.

### **Medication Management:**

Clients often require precise medication administration schedules. Falling asleep may result in missed doses, incorrect timing, or inadequate monitoring of the client's response to medications, jeopardizing the effectiveness of the treatment plan.

### **Professional Consequences:**

Falling asleep during shifts poses a significant risk to clients' safety, and for healthcare teams can lead to serious professional consequences including:

- safeguarding and/or disciplinary investigations
- disciplinary actions including dismissal from employment
- consequent referrals to the DBS and NMC (if Registered Nurse)
- damage to one's professional reputation and career (i.e. inability to continue working within the healthcare sector, or restrictions added to their professional registration)
- potential legal implications.

**Personal Wellbeing:** Being involved in incidents that compromised client's safety and/or resulted in serious incidents can seriously impact emotional wellbeing of healthcare professionals involved in the situation. Additional distress will be caused by involvement in formal investigations, which may lead to serious professional outcomes.

# HOW TO PREPARE FOR NIGHT SHIFTS

## GET EXTRA SLEEP BEFORE YOUR NIGHT SHIFT

- Try to have a long lie in, ideally until midday on the morning before your first night shift.
- Take a two-hour afternoon nap before the shift.
- Nap in the afternoon rather than just before the shift. We naturally feel sleepy in the afternoon making it easier to nap.

## GOOD SLEEP ROUTINE

Invest in getting sleep right every night, not just when working nights, to improve long term sleep quality.

- Your bedroom should be cool, dark and quiet.
- Try to keep a regular sleep routine.
- Avoid electric devices in bed.
- Minimise alcohol, caffeine and nicotine in the evening.
- Only sleep when sleepy.



## TIPS FOR STAYING AWAKE

### Exposure to Bright Light

If it's possible, try to keep your work area bright. Bright light from overhead or desk lamps has an alerting effect on the brain. Even if you can only get intermittent exposure this will still be beneficial.

### Don't skip meals

Eat and drink properly so you do not start your night shift hungry or dehydrated. You should eat a full meal before you start your shift and have a meal halfway through your shift.

Eat frequent light meals or healthy snacks to avoid the drowsiness that is associated with heavy meals.

- Avoid fried, spicy or processed food as these are harder to digest and can leave you feeling lethargic. Instead, fill up on fruit, veg and slow release carbohydrates such as potatoes or pasta.
- Eating small snacks throughout your working night will help keep your energy up.
- Choose foods that are easy for your body to digest, including bread, rice, pasta, salad, milk products, fruits, and vegetables.

- Steer clear of sugary foods. Although they provide a short-term energy boost, this is quickly followed by an energy dip.
- Snack on fruits and vegetables. Sugars from these are converted slowly into energy, and they are an important source of vitamins, minerals, and fibre.

### Stay hydrated

Drinking plenty of water throughout your shift will help you keep alert and energised.

Dehydration can leave you feeling fatigued because it affects the flow of oxygen to the brain and results in your heart having to work harder to then pump the oxygen around your body. This leaves you feeling more tired and a lot less alert.



## Limit caffeine intake

Having a caffeinated drink before you begin your shift or earlier on into the night can give you a much-needed boost and help you to stay alert and awake.

However, avoid drinking coffee, tea or fizzy drinks that contain caffeine later on in your shift, as they can make it difficult for you to fall asleep when you get home – thereby interrupting your sleep cycle.

Caffeine can cause muscle shakes, irritability and stomach upsets if overused.

If you decide to use caffeine, take it in smaller and more frequent amounts, it can help overcome any sleep inertia.

However, caffeine should be discontinued at least 6 hours before the end of the shift, as its long-lasting effect may impact your daytime sleep.



## Keep busy

While night shifts can typically be slower, keeping your body moving will keep your blood flowing and mind awake. Try to stand up and walk or even do some quick exercises to keep yourself awake.

When feeling tiredness affecting you, walk to the kitchen and try to make a hot or cold drink.

Try not clock-watch, as this can increase fatigue and make the night feel longer.



## HEALTHY ROUTINE

### Getting home from night shift If you are too tired, DO NOT drive

Driving overtired is like driving at the legal drink-drive limit. Try to take public transport instead if this is possible, or call someone to pick you up.

### Sunglasses

Research has shown that night workers who were exposed to bright light during their shift and wore sunglasses on the way home to suppress light drifted off to sleep quicker and slept for longer after their shift than people who received no bright light exposure during their shift.

### Get to bed quickly

On getting home, try to sleep immediately. Try not to get distracted by things that delay getting to bed. The longer you delay, the more awake you will feel and the harder it will be to fall asleep.

### Avoid alcohol and nicotine

Avoid alcohol before you try to sleep. Alcohol may help you to fall asleep, but it diminishes sleep quality and disturbs the deep stages of sleep, which will leave you feeling unrefreshed the next day.

Avoid smoking before bed. Nicotine is a stimulant and can therefore cause you to experience difficulties in getting to sleep.

Stay away from activities that make you feel more alert until the hours before your next shift.



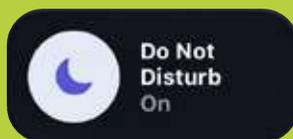
## Daytime sleep routine

Develop a routine for daytime sleep.

In order to function properly after a night shift, you ideally need 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Try and set aside this time during the day to help with your recovery.

Have something to eat and drink before you go to bed. Pangs of hunger or thirst may wake you up.

- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Use earplugs to block out daytime noise and blackout curtains to prevent daylight entering the room.
- Electric fans can be useful to keep air circulating and provide neutral background noise.
- Switch off your mobile.



- Notify friends and family of your working hours so that they do not disturb you.
- Beware of exposure to blue light emitted from digital devices, such as your smartphone, tablet, or television, before you go to bed after a night shift. Research has suggested that blue light knocks our circadian rhythms off-kilter, which signals to your brain that it is daytime and results in poorer sleep quality.
- Sleeping tablets are not recommended as they can have hangover / addictive effects.

Expose yourself to bright light for 20 minutes after waking and try to get some light exercise in.

If this is your last shift in a block of night shifts, remember that the more days in a row that you have been working through the night, the more sleep debt you will likely have accrued. Repaying some of the sleep debt that you accumulate as quickly as possible will help you to recover sooner.

# KEY POINTS

## FACTS

- Night shifts require you to be alert when your body tells you to sleep
- Working at nights can generate a sleep debt.
- When you are sleep-deprived, you are prone to make mistakes and can fall asleep.
- Falling asleep on duty can lead to severe consequences to both clients and healthcare teams, therefore it is very important to maintain a healthy routine when working nights.

## PREPARATION

- Get extra sleep before working your first night shift.
- Take a two-hour afternoon sleep before your night shift.
- Have a healthy light meal before your shift.
- Build a healthy sleep routine.

## DURING THE NIGHT SHIFT

- Try to get exposure to bright light during your shift.
- Stay awake by standing up, walking or quick exercise.
- Have frequent healthy snacks throughout the night.
- Don't eat heavy meals before or during your shift.
- Stay hydrated.
- Use caffeine cautiously.

## AFTER YOUR NIGHT SHIFT

- If planning a long drive home, consider the level of your tiredness.
- On getting home, try to sleep immediately.
- Develop a routine for sleeping during the daytime.
- Try to keep your sleep debt to a minimum.

## OUR WELLBEING TEAM

If you struggle with any aspects of your role, require further support, or simply would like to chat to someone, our Wellbeing Team is there for you. To speak to our Wellbeing Team about any matter, or to book a mental health referral or menopause review appointment, please use the below contact details.

### Wellbeing Team

- Phone: **01227 640 500** (line open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm)
- Email: **wellbeing@superiorhealthcare.co.uk**

### Employee Assistance Programme:

We also have a dedicated Employee Assistance Line, which is open 24/7 and offers guidance and support in any challenging situations. You will be able to talk to qualified counsellors or legal professionals who will support you with your concern.

- 24/7 support phonenumber: **08000 280 199** (quote Superior Healthcare)

### Wellbeing App:

To access all wellbeing information and advice, including the details of the Employee Assistance Programme, please follow the below instructions.

- Download the Health Assured 'Wisdom' App which offers access to a range of features, all aimed at improving your health and wellbeing. To log in, use this code: **MHA229542**





## Contact us

### TRAINING

T: 01227 771133

E: [training@superiorhealthcare.co.uk](mailto:training@superiorhealthcare.co.uk)

### TEMPORARY AGENCY STAFFING

T: 01622 230800

E: [agency@superiorhealthcare.co.uk](mailto:agency@superiorhealthcare.co.uk)

### COMPLEX CARE SERVICES

T: 01227 771122

E: [care@superiorhealthcare.co.uk](mailto:care@superiorhealthcare.co.uk)

[superiorhealthcare.co.uk](http://superiorhealthcare.co.uk)