

Sleep Tips

We've all woken up after a bad night's sleep feeling groggy and grouchy. While these feelings are familiar to all of us, what we may not consider is the toll on our health that chronic sleep deprivation could take. Aside from your day-to-day functioning and productivity, studies have shown that not sleeping well can cause other problems such as weight gain, depression, and headaches.

If it seems strange to you that sleep plays such a pivotal role in your overall wellness, it may help you to think of sleep as your body's reset button. While scientists are still unable to find a scientific reason for our need to sleep, we do know that it is crucial to the daily performance of both the mind and the body. While a bad night of sleep here and there makes for a rough start to the day, it is not a cause for alarm, provided you generally sleep well. However, if you feel that you are suffering from sleep deprivation, the following includes a list of suggestions to help you get better sleep.

- Avoid eating or drinking after 8 pm (or 2 hours before you go to bed). Going to bed with a full stomach can lead to heartburn in your sleep.
- Not drinking liquids at night will also prevent you from taking late night bathroom breaks when you could be sleeping.
- If you exercise later in the day, be sure you finish up at least three hours before going to sleep. This gives your body plenty of time to cool off, as body temperature spikes while exercising.
- Minimize outside interference with your sleep. A sleep mask and a pair of earplugs block out light and noise can help reduce outside stimuli. Once your brain reacts to a stimulus it may be difficult to shut off your brain.
- Be sure you have your home's temperature regulated to a comfortable sleeping temperature.
- If you are a smoker, avoid smoking late at night, even though a cigarette may feel calming. The tobacco acts as a stimulant and will cause you to wake up later on

Night Work: The Effects of Working 2nd & 3rd Shift

If you've ever watched a television show about doctors, you've probably seen how residents have shifts that last for days, with these new, young doctors catching a few winks whenever they have down time. We all know that's not a healthy way to manage sleep and work, but the costs of such behavior can be surprisingly severe. For example, a recent study shows that doctors in their residency who suffer from a lack of sleep perform comparably to having had three or four cocktails. This statistic may sound horrifying, especially for those of us with medical issues, but not to worry. An 80-hour work week limit has long been in place for residents in a strong attempt combat such an issue. While grogginess and poor performance are immediate problems that arise from sleep deprivation associated with working second or third shift, the larger issue at stake is your circadian rhythm.

The circadian rhythm is a natural function of the body that tells you to go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning. Working a second and third shift job obviously requires you to do some creative sleeping, but it is wise to be aware of the consequences of shaking up your circadian rhythm. For example, obesity, bipolar disorder, and a weakened immune system have all been linked to a change in circadian rhythm. A study shows that a dysfunctional sleep-wake cycle can cause an increase in triglycerides. What this means is that mice whose circadian rhythm was disrupted became confused, ate for longer periods of time, and were less active than mice that followed their body's natural circadian rhythm.

The effects of a disjointed sleep-wake certainly seem frightening, but for those of us who work second and third shift jobs, there are ways to combat these undesired effects: Nutrition is key. Don't eat a big meal at the end of your shift, as you will go to bed with it in your stomach. Also, be sure to stay hydrated. Drinking plenty of water will avoid you experiencing cramps or headaches. If you use caffeine, be careful how late in the day you use it.

Try to get to bed as soon as possible after your shift ends. Try not to get involved with any household duties or errands. Sleep aids may be helpful for the occasional time when you can't find sleep, but in the long run they may prevent you from letting your body clock adjust to your job schedule. Also, we can develop a dependency on using them to go to sleep. Exercise is important. If you have a long break and the opportunity to do some exercise, that would be a great time to do even a few jumping jacks or stretches. Avoid exercising after your shift before going to bed, as that will stimulate your body instead of relaxing it. Be consistent with your sleep schedules. Our bodies get thrown out of synch when we change our times we go to bed.