Shiftwork Checklist



What Can You Do to Prevent Fatigue Issues with Shiftwork?

Shiftwork and shift workers are necessary and instrumental in keeping so many vital operations goings 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This could mean working nights or alternating days, nights and afternoons, or other irregular shifts.

Twenty-five percent of workers in North America are shift workers. Shiftwork has been associated with health and safety risks, both in and out of work.

There is strong evidence that shiftwork is associated with an increased risk of occupational injury due to:

- Worker fatigue.
- Less supervision.
- Less co-worker supports.

The risk of an incident was found to be 20 percent greater during the first to second hours of a night shift. A smaller increase in incident likelihood was found to exist between 3 am. and 4 am.

Shiftwork and the disruptions in sleep it causes have also been shown to create changes in appetite, gastrointestinal and digestive issues.

Shift workers face emotional challenges. Shiftwork affects how much time a worker spends with family and friends. It can also make it challenging to participate in clubs, sports and other social activities that are designed for a normal 9-5 schedule. This can lead to relationship problems, depression and feelings of isolation.

What can be done to deal with issues of shiftwork.

Require daytime managers to periodically work at night

Managers who’ve experienced the challenges that of working at 4 A.M. are more likely to think of practical ways to improve the safety and wellness of their shift workers than managers who’ve never experienced a night shift.

Evaluate your work environment

Conduct a comprehensive review of your workplace to identify factors that contribute to fatigue – such as dim lighting, poor airflow, and warm temperatures (i.e. over 70 degrees).

Put shiftwork safety on the agenda

Make sure that overnight safety is a mandated discussion point at safety committee meetings and that night workers have a seat at the table.

Teach workers about sleep and napping

Getting enough off-duty sleep is the most effective way to maintain alertness. You can't force workers to sleep, but you can ensure that they are given sufficient shiftwork lifestyle training to educate them on the fundamental importance of sleep, getting quality daytime sleep, and making the most of pre-work naps.

Permit several short breaks

Many shiftwork jobs involve doing the same task for long stretches of time. This monotony can induce microsleeps and other lapses in alertness – especially on the night shift. In addition to a 25- to 35-minute break per shift, workers on the night shift benefit from a 10- to 15-minute break every two or three hours.

Assess your schedule

No shiftwork schedule is perfect, but some are particularly difficult. Schedules that require workers to rotate backward (i.e., to go from nights to evenings to days) or work five or more consecutive 12-hour shifts can exacerbate fatigue levels.

Monitor overtime

People are more likely to make mistakes when they've accumulated a sleep debt from several days of insufficient sleep – which may result from excess overtime. Keep an eye on overall overtime levels (including a breakdown of day vs. night OT hours) and identify individual "overtime hogs" who accrue large amounts of extra work hours.

Standardize shift change procedures

A large proportion of accidents occur during shift changes because of the additional movement around the plant and the increased need for communication among workers. Make sure you have procedures in place that ensure a smooth transition between shifts.

Watch out for "The Wall"

Due to the dip in circadian rhythms, the hours between 4 and 6 A.M. are generally the hardest – and riskiest – hours of the night shift to work. Exercise has been shown to boost alertness, making an exercise bike or treadmill available for interested workers may minimize the risk of "hitting the wall".

Don't forget the drive home

Due to the increased risk of falling asleep at the wheel, the post-shift commute home is often a dangerous part of a shift worker's day. Provide workers with a quiet room to nap in before heading home.

Provide shiftwork lifestyle training

Whether it's handing out relevant literature, providing training online, or holding in-person seminars – it's always a wise idea to educate workers on the health and safety challenges of shiftwork. Providing shiftwork lifestyle training is also a great way to show workers that you recognize the unique challenges they face – which can improve employee morale.

Managing a Shiftwork Lifestyle Training

Working closely with researchers and experienced shift workers, CIRCADIAN has developed the Managing a Shiftwork Lifestyle training program to provide practical solutions for easing the adjustment and day-to-day difficulties associated with shiftwork lifestyles.