

Shift Work Changes - How to Stay Awake and Stay Employed

It's been estimated that over 20% of the US population is doing some type of shift work at the any given time. Companies use shift work to increase production. But frequent shift changes can actually reduce production instead of increasing it. If you do shift work and need to find an easy way to stay awake (and stay on the job) then read the tips in this article.

What is it that Makes Changing Shifts so Hard?

The human body has a natural energy system called the circadian rhythm. Your energy flows in cycles from peak highs to lows. We all know the instinctive urge to fall asleep when our circadian rhythm has reached a low point.

When we change to a new work schedule, it may take a week or two but our circadian rhythm eventually resyncs and we stay alert doing working hours and sleep when we are off shift. That is if the work change is permanent.

But rotating shift work can create what is called "shift lag". Shift lag is very similar to "jet lag" or sleep deprivation. Basically your body never really gets back into sync before you change schedules on it. Shift lag is the leading cause of poor work performance and industrial accidents.

Some tips to help you with shift lag:

- Forget the OT – working overtime or a extra shift sounds like a good way to make extra money, but sleep deprivation because of shift lag will cost you in the long run if you are hurt.
- Move closer to Work – A long commute to and from work, burns up valuable sleep time. Plus you will be more prone to falling asleep at the wheel driving longer distances.
- Avoid rotating shifts – It's the changing of work shifts more than once a week that messes up your circadian rhythm not the shift itself.
- Sleep in – If possible catch up on your sleep when you are off shift. This can be very difficult for people with families. But getting a good night's sleep can make you feel better and increase your work production.