



January 2024

Happy New Year

Shift into 2024

In this issue we thought it might be important to talk about Shift Work:

Shift work is nothing new and is an important part of our work environment, especially in the essential services arena, however this is changing with more and more young families considering the attractive earning potential of jobs being offered. All over Canada this is occurring from capital cities to regional towns, where families are looking at anywhere from seven to twenty one days apart with three to ten days off in blocks. This begs the question of what effect this is having on the family. How does the marriage, couple or family relationship cope with such times apart and changing work hours? What about the parenting of children and being involved with their sports and activities? ...”

In particular, problems that most families manage to resolve on a day to day basis can escalate where one of the family members is regularly absent or continually tired and emotionally depleted. The risk is that everyday problems that are left unresolved can escalate into more chronic family dysfunction

For a shift worker who is struggling with the turmoil of irregular sleep and work times as well as extended time away it will be much harder to relate to the emotional needs of their partner and family which can easily lead to tension and further difficulties within the relationship.

Quotes from a shift workers dilemma:

I’m not whining. I know other people work long hours, but they get a decent break. I have bigger issues with my wife; she doesn’t want me here... it’ll be the finish...she’d rather I go on E.I. and have me home. There would seem to be a range of emotions experienced by a shift worker due to tiredness and loneliness that are detrimental to good communication with their partner and children...”

Regardless of the type of non-traditional hours spent working, there are three key areas to consider when looking at the impact of shiftwork:

1. Work-family balance
2. Physical wellbeing
3. Mental wellbeing

This is particularly important when looking at the extra responsibilities associated with being a parent. There has been an increase in non-standard work hours recently, which studies attribute to demands for greater shift flexibility from employers and employees.

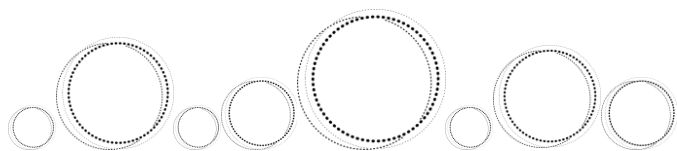
In the USA, about one-third of mothers report that adopting a non-standard work schedule means their children can be cared for by a spouse, friend or family member during their work hours.

Similarly in Australia, working non-standard hours has become a strategy for many families to manage their childcare needs, enabling ‘split-shift’ parenting to cover childcare needs not met by formal care, which may not be available or may be too expensive.

If you have the option of choosing the length of your shifts, research suggests there are very few differences when comparing people who worked a shorter night shift (about eight hours) or a longer shift (about 12 hours) on overall wellbeing.

Where there is no option in shiftwork scheduling quality time that encompasses developmentally important activities such as reading to a child, helping them with their homework and enjoying leisure and social activities as a family, will help nurture the parent-child relationship.

What can the individual do to manage shiftwork? People who work shifts face many problems that others do not recognize. The difficulties stem from the change in eating, sleeping, and working patterns. The following guidelines can help people manage better.



Guidelines for Diet and Eating Patterns

- Maintain regular eating patterns as much as possible. Balanced, varied meals are very important. Keep family meal times the same even though the work routine constantly changes. Family meals may need to be altered in content to suit the shift worker.
- Afternoon workers should have the main meal in the middle of the day instead of the middle of the work shift. Night workers should eat lightly throughout the shift and have a moderate breakfast. This way, they should not get too hungry while sleeping during the day, and digestive discomfort should be minimal.
- Pay careful attention to the type of food eaten. Drink lots of water and eat the recommended balance of vegetables, fruit, lean meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, grains, and bread. Eat crackers, nuts, and fruit instead of pop and candy bars during work breaks. Reduce the intake of salt, caffeine, and alcohol. Avoid greasy foods, particularly at night.
- Relax during meals and allow time for digestion.



Sleep

- Sleep on a set schedule to help establish a routine and to make sleep during the day easier. Some people may prefer to get a full period of rest just before the next work shift. Try different patterns of work and sleep to see which is best for you.
- Make sure that family and friends are aware of and considerate of the worker's sleep hours and needs.
- Make time for quiet relaxation before bed to help get better sleep. Learn how to relax using muscle relaxation, breathing techniques.
- If you still do not fall asleep after an hour, read a book or listen to quiet music on the radio for a while. If sleep still does not come, reschedule sleeping hours for later.
- Limit commitments later in the day to allow for napping.

Other Important Considerations

- ✓ Pay attention to general physical fitness and good health habits.
- ✓ Learn how to recognize and reduce stress through physical fitness, relaxation techniques and so on.
- ✓ Take leisure seriously

Source for this newsletter comes from Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

To make an appointment simply phone one of the numbers listed below. One of our administrative assistants will be pleased to help you arrange your appointment.



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