Sleepstation

Sleep Tips for Shift Workers

- You can help keep your biological clock tuned in to your sleep with anchor sleep. Aim to have at least four hours sleep at the same time every night/morning (e.g. 37am). This seems to help keep your sleep clock regular.

- Use the weekend or days off to get in some extra "recovery" sleep.

- Make sure the sleeping environment is as conducive to rest as possible. A comfortable bed in a dark, well ventilated room, is essential. And when we say dark, we mean dark – invest in some blackout curtains. If you work shifts, you really need to reset that biological clock. Also, aim to cut out as much extraneous noise if possible: install double glazing; use ear plugs.

- Avoid stimulants (eg caffeine), large meals or vigorous exercise for at least 34 hours before going to bed. Also, avoid over the counter sleeping aids which may make you over sleepy when you need to be alert (driving home, for example)

- If you have trouble getting to sleep, lavender, passion flower, hops, orange blossom, Scot's pine, chamomile and peppermint all claim to promote sleep. And milky night time drinks really do help bring on the Zzzs.

- The Romans thought that lettuce was good for sleep, but the crèmedelacrème "sleep sandwich" has to be a banana, marmite and lettuce buttie: the banana and marmite contain natural substances that help induce sleep.

- If you're an owl, you usually go to bed late and get up late, so shift work will be less of a problem than it is for larks, who prefer to get up early and go to bed early. Bright light in the evening (you can get light bulbs with a much higher lux value than ordinary, domestic bulbs) and avoiding the dawn light by wearing sunglasses can help.

- Maximum sleepiness occurs when your biological clock temperature is at its lowest – usually around 4am. Your personal level of alertness is controlled by your biological clock and by how much sleep you have had. Remember sleeplessness leads to poor concentration, thinking, memory, increased irritability and hostility. Alcohol magnifies these effects.

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