



## Healthy sleep ...and how your workplace can support it

Sleep is essential for a productive lifestyle and overall health and wellness. In fact, we spend about one third of our entire life asleep! In Canada, 32% of adults sleep shorter than the recommended seven to nine hours each night. This sleep deprivation can lead to increased absenteeism, presenteeism, and accidents and injuries in the workplace.

Why do we need sleep?

- Restores functions (e.g. makes proteins, hormones, muscle growth, tissue repair, etc.)
- Helps us learn by creating neuropathways
- Helps with memory
- Enables growth
- Heals previous day's stresses
- Gives physical energy for the next day
- Regulates emotions
- Improves attention and mental health
- Clears toxins from the brain that build up during the day

In this issue, you will be able to assess your own sleep habits, discover ways to deal with shiftwork and learn how your workplace can support optimal sleep habits.



There are many things you do during the day that can affect the quality and quantity of your sleep. The things you do during the day and before bedtime are called sleep hygiene. To complete the table below, think about how each response affects the quality and quantity of your sleep.

Circle each response that applies to you	Column A	Column B
1. Do you wake up and go to bed at the same time every day – even on weekends and days off?	Yes	No
2. Do you have a relaxing routine at least one hour before bedtime, e.g. warm bath, reading, listening to calming music, etc.?	Yes	No
3. Is your bedroom dark, quiet, cool, and comfortable?	Yes	No
4. Do you have a phone, computer or TV in your bedroom?	No	Yes
5. Are you physically active during the day?	Yes	No
6. Do you get lots of bright light in the morning?	Yes	No
7. Do you drink caffeine after noon?	No	Yes
8. Do you drink alcohol within two hours of going to bed?	No	Yes
9. Do you watch TV, go on your phone, computer, or tablet within one hour before bedtime?	No	Yes
10. Do you nap during the day?	No	Yes
11. Do you eat a large meal before going to bed?	No	Yes
12. Do you have a small snack before going to bed?	Yes	No
13. Do you set aside time to deal with stress, e.g. to list next day's tasks?	Yes	No
14. Do you go to bed when you are tired?	Yes	No
15. Do you take non-prescription medication to get to sleep?	No	Yes

Count the number of responses you had in column A:

**13-15 responses:** Wow! You have great sleep habits. Keep it up!

**10-12 responses:** Great work! You have many healthy sleeping habits. For even greater benefits, select 2 or 3 items in column B to work on every day.

**7-9 responses:** You have some healthy sleep habits but may benefit by selecting 2 or 3 items in column B to work on every day.

**Less than 7 responses:** Your sleeping habits may be negatively affecting your sleep. To help improve your sleeping habits, select 2 or 3 items in column B to work on every day.

# Strategies for shift workers

On average, night shift workers sleep for almost one hour and a half less than day shift workers. Night shift workers must sleep during the day when the circadian system is at its strongest and work while the system is at its lowest which often results in poor sleep. This lack of sleep can accumulate over the years and lead to the development of health problems.

## Consequences of lack of sleep

- Weakened immune system
- Impaired brain activity
- Weight gain
- Heart disease
- Workplace injuries

1. Make sleep a priority.
2. Maintain a regular sleep schedule as best you can – even on your days off.
3. If possible, plan for a fixed sleep period (for example from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.) which will always be dedicated to your sleep, both during days you work and the days you are off.
4. Control your sleeping environment. A bedroom that is dark, quiet, comfortable, and cool can help promote restful sleep. Consider using blackout curtains to prevent sunlight coming in from your windows. You may also use an air conditioner to keep your bedroom cool as well as cover any noises in or outside your home.
5. Split your sleeping into two parts. Sleep for a few hours when you get home from your night shift then another few hours before your next shift.
6. Keep caffeine use to the beginning of your shift.
7. Limit alcohol and hard-to-digest foods in the few hours before your bedtime. Alcohol may help you relax, however, your sleep will be less deep and you may wake up more frequently. Eat a light snack before going to bed (such as whole grain cereal and milk or fruit and yogurt) and avoid heavy meals.
8. Avoid bright light on the way home from work if you work night shift. Wear dark, wrap-around sunglasses and a large hat to shield yourself from the morning daylight.
9. Keep the same bedtime routine regardless of the time you go to bed. For example, brushing your teeth, changing into pajamas, reading, etc. Following the same routine helps your body and mind recognize it is time for sleep.

For more tips on how to adjust to shift work visit the Canadian Sleep Society at [www.css-scs.ca](http://www.css-scs.ca).

Well rested workers are more productive, happy, and are less likely to be absent, and suffer from workplace injuries.

**What can the workplace do?**

- Provide resources/educational sessions about healthy sleep
- Discourage checking and sending emails after work hours
- Recognize that stress is a factor that negatively affects sleep
- Where possible, keep each employee on the same shift
- When shifts must be rotated, rotate them forwards (morning to afternoon to evening to night)
- Avoid scheduling back-to-back shifts
- Provide a quiet space for breaks/naps
- Encourage physical activity during shifts
- Change shifts from 12 hours to 8 hours

Creating healthy workplaces benefits everyone!

## Resources and references:

Public Health Sudbury & Districts [www.phsd.ca](http://www.phsd.ca)

Canadian Sleep Society [www.css-scs.ca](http://www.css-scs.ca)

National Sleep Foundation [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

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