

**PEAK**   
**PERFORMANCE**  
**LIVING PROGRAM**

**Shiftwork -  
How We Survive!**

**SHIFTWORK PILOT GROUP  
FEEDBACK ON ADAPTING TO SHIFTWORK**

The Shiftwork Pilot Group consisted of a group of dedicated EPCOR Shiftworkers and Managers who participated in the first '*Adapting to Shiftwork*' course in April 2002. This group met on several occasions over the next year and kindly shared their strategies for surviving shiftwork. This booklet contains their tips. Why not give them a try? Enjoy!

**A special *Thank You* to our Pilot Group  
for their input and feedback.**

***What is the best routine for preparing for the day shift?***



Most shiftworkers find that preparing for days is the most difficult to do. It is hard to get to sleep early and they also experience sleep fragmentation and late onset insomnia. Often they wake up two or three times through the night. Some go to work having accumulated only five or six hours of sleep.

1. Perform light physical activity (e.g. walk, bike ride) after supper.
2. On the night before the first day shift, go to bed one-half to one hour earlier than usual.
3. Eat a light carbohydrate snack (e.g. cereal, toast) before going to bed.
4. Don't drink coffee late in the day.
5. Do not disturb the family in the morning.
6. Have breakfast at home or at work.
7. Prepare the night before (i.e. make lunch and dinner, set clothes out, etc.) so that you can sleep as late as possible.
8. Limit activities of children and other family members so you can get good sleep.
9. Do more physical activity the day before so you are physically tired and can sleep well.
10. Soak in a hot tub before bed.

### ***What is the best routine for preparing for the night shift?***

1. Use the drifting sleep technique. The night before the first night shift stay up until early in the morning (i.e. 3:00 a.m.), then sleep through until 3:00 p.m., then get up and start getting ready to go to work.
2. Get up as usual in the morning on the day of the night shift but plan to have an afternoon nap before going to work.
3. Try to get to sleep as soon as you get home from night shift rather than starting your sleep later in the morning. You will likely get a longer sleep.
4. Protect your sleep and recovery time during the day. Make up for lost domestic and social time on days off.
5. Ensure that good lighting is available at your work station and lunch room. It is also helpful to be exposed to good lighting when waking up and having breakfast at home.
6. Caffeine is effective at promoting alertness for short periods of time. Having caffeine too close to the end of the night shift can reduce your ability to fall asleep.

7. A major hazard for the night shift worker is the drive home. Many workers at the end of this shift have gone 24 hours without sleep. Drive the speed limit and drive defensively. To stay alert while driving keep the window open, chew gum or licorice, or listen to music. If you start to nod off, pull off the road, get out and walk around or have a 15 minute power nap.
8. Keep the workplace social. The more communication and social interaction you have with other night workers the more alert and positive you will be.
9. Eat lighter meals and eat less on the night shift.
10. Minimize exposure to sunlight (i.e. wear sunglasses on the drive home).
11. It is better to be active the day before (light activity) than to be a couch potato.
12. Have a routine set out for the family so they are quiet.
13. Have a sleep area that is quiet, dark, cool and has white noise.



***What is the best routine for preparing and coping with the mid-afternoon circadian trough (2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.)?***

1. Plan work schedule so that physically active tasks can be done at this time. Save most enjoyable tasks for these times.
2. During this time avoid safety sensitive jobs and activities that require a lot of concentration. Plan shift so that the bulk of this kind of work is done prior to this period.
3. Get up and move around (physical activity) or do stretching exercises. If working at a console, stand up at your station and make sure you flex and move your legs, arms and shoulders.
4. Eat a light meal (i.e. small portions, low fat) prior to this time which includes protein and carbohydrates (e.g. vegetables, fruit and grain products).
5. Drink coffee or tea to get a caffeine boost. Realize that it may create a momentary low period a little later on.
6. Get some fresh air or expose self to brighter light or natural light.
7. Listen to music or radio talk shows.
8. Make sure you are properly hydrated. Drink 7 to 8 glasses of water a day.
9. Talk to co-workers (i.e. small talk).

***What is the best routine for preparing and coping with the mid-morning circadian trough (2:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.)?***

1. The mid-morning trough is very difficult for most shift workers. Anticipate your points of low alertness and take appropriate counter measures.
2. Have a light but balanced lunch (e.g. proteins, carbohydrates, low fat) prior to this period. Keep blood sugar levels even throughout the night.
3. Have light snacks (e.g. fruit, vegetables and grain products) through this trough.
4. Plan to do critical work prior to this period.
5. Change posture frequently. Alternate standing and sitting. Walk around the work area.
6. “Buddy-up” whenever possible. Talk to someone in person or on the phone.
7. Wear additional layers of clothing to compensate for getting chills on the night run. Refrain from turning up the thermostat in the control room.
8. Increase work environment illumination or spend some brake time in a well-lit area.
9. Take a power nap (e.g. on a break if someone is there to cover).
10. Use caffeine effectively.
11. Listen to music or radio talk shows.
12. Make sure you are properly hydrated.



***What nutritional changes have you made?***

1. Grazing (i.e. smaller meals, eating more regularly). Eat every 3 to 4 hours.
2. Lighter eating (i.e. cereals, soup, fruit and vegetables).
3. More balanced diet.
4. Cut out seconds and deserts, or make second helpings consist of veggies or fruit.
5. Feed the stomach first, the mind second (i.e. fill up on healthy things and then satisfy a craving by having a taste of what it is you crave).
6. Drink more water which provides a feeling of fullness and helps the body get rid of breakdown products. You will feel tired if you are dehydrated.
7. Eat more fruits and vegetables.

### *What sleep changes have you made?*

1. Earplugs are very helpful as is a white noise generator like a fan or an air conditioning unit. The constant hum buffers other sounds making them less disturbing to the sleeper.
2. Unplug the phone or at least turn the volume or bell down low.
3. Heavy drapes on the windows help keep a bedroom dark for better sleep and can also add an extra degree of sound insulation.
4. A cool (19-20 Celsius) room also contributes to a better sleep.
5. Tension can be eased by reading something light to prepare yourself for sleep.
6. Have a warm bath before bedtime.
7. Swimming, walking, or jogging improve digestion, work off pent-up energy, and help individuals to sleep. For best sleep results you should allow at least two hours of wind down time between the end of your exercise and the beginning of sleep.
8. Listen to relaxing music.
9. Try to resolve or set aside any of the day's conflicts left hanging over your head.
10. Practice the drifting sleep technique. The night before the first night shift stay up until early in the morning then sleep in that day.
11. Use the split sleep technique. Plan to have an afternoon nap before going to work that night.
12. Practice the delayed sleep technique. On your first day off after night shift force yourself to get up at noon. This results in you having a better chance of sleeping at a regular time that night.
13. Try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day and on days off.
14. Develop a comfortable routine before going to bed. For example you might take a warm shower or bath, change into your bed clothes, brush and floss your teeth, set your alarm, read something light, then turn off the lights.
15. Keep power naps between 15 and 20 minutes long.

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