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## Healthy Lifestyle

# Adult health

## I just started working the night shift, and I'm having trouble sleeping during the day. Do you have any sleep tips for shift workers?

Answers from Timothy Morgenthaler, M.D.

Humans are naturally wired to be awake during the day and to sleep at night. Good daytime sleep is possible, though, if shift work is a necessary part of your work life.

To promote better sleep during the day:

- **Avoid stimulants before bedtime.** If you're working nights and need to sleep from morning until afternoon, you might try to avoid caffeine after midnight.
- **Create a restful environment.** To promote uninterrupted sleep, turn off or unplug your phone and hang room-darkening shades on the windows. You might also turn down the thermostat, wear an eye mask and earplugs, and post a "Do not disturb" sign on your bedroom door. Schedule appointments outside of your sleep period, and remind your family and friends to leave you alone while you sleep.
- **Take naps.** Napping late in the day before work might help you make up your sleep debt. Napping for 30 minutes on a break might increase alertness and enhance your performance, including quicker reaction time and better memory. Keep it short, though. The longer you nap, the more likely you are to feel groggy afterward.
- **Stick to the routine.** Going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day helps promote good sleep. Be as consistent as possible, even on weekends and days off, for as long as you work the shift.
- **Make healthy lifestyle choices.** Eat a healthy diet and include physical activity in your daily routine. Plan to work out after you wake up rather than before you go to sleep. Resist the temptation to use junk food or nicotine to stay awake or alcohol to get to sleep.

If these tips don't help, consult your doctor or a sleep specialist.

With

Timothy Morgenthaler, M.D.

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May 17, 2014

Original article: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/shift-work/expert-answers/FAQ-20057991>

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