

# Shift work in healthcare

Patient care depends on the delivery of many NHS services working shift patterns. Poorly managed shift systems can impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and patients, but organisations and individuals can help mitigate the risks.



**45%** of women in shift work have a longstanding illness, compared with **39%** who work non-shift hours.

**40%** of men in shift work have a longstanding illness, compared with **36%** who work non-shift hours.

## Shift workers are more likely to suffer from:<sup>1</sup>





**20%** of accidents on the road are caused by work fatigue.<sup>2</sup>

**£115m to £240m** the cost to the UK annually due to fatigue-related accidents at work.<sup>3</sup>

**1 in 9** people in the UK workforce work nights.<sup>4</sup>

## The impact **poorly managed shift work** could have...

### On your organisation:

- ★☆☆☆☆ Poorer patient care and safety.
-  Reduced productivity.
-  Increased absenteeism.



### On an individual:

- Poor work-life balance.
- Fatigue and sleep deprivation.
- Increased risk of developing a long-term condition or being involved in an accident.

## Employers can take the following action:

- Follow healthy shift patterns e.g forward rotating and limits to consecutive nights.
- Allow adequate breaks within and between shifts.
- Consult with staff and reps on any changes and review shift patterns.
- Have agreed protocols to cover unplanned shifts.
- Ensure staff have access to healthy food.
- Consider the needs of vulnerable workers.

## Individuals can take the following action:

- Seek support if you are suffering from sleep deprivation.
- Raise any concerns about risks, such as the impact of fatigue on patient safety.
- Take extra care when driving after night and extended shifts.
- Make sure you take adequate breaks, drink water and eat healthy foods.

For further advice go to: [www.nhsemployers.org/health-safety-and-wellbeing-group-hswg](http://www.nhsemployers.org/health-safety-and-wellbeing-group-hswg)

1 Redeker et al., (2019), Workplace interventions to promote sleep health and an alert, healthy workforce [jcsm.aasm.org/doi/10.5664/jcsm.7734#d3e264](https://doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.7734#d3e264)  
 2 The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (2019) Fatigue and Driving [iosh.com/media/8176/fatigue-and-road-accidents-2020-ioshchiltern.pdf](https://www.iosh.com/media/8176/fatigue-and-road-accidents-2020-ioshchiltern.pdf)  
 3 Health and Safety Executive (2021), Human factors: Fatigue [www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/fatigue.htm](https://www.hse.gov.uk/humanfactors/topics/fatigue.htm)  
 4 TUC (2019) Older workers powering an increase in night working, TUC analysis reveals. [www.tuc.org.uk/news/older-workers-powering-increase-night-working-tuc-analysis-reveals](https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/older-workers-powering-increase-night-working-tuc-analysis-reveals)