

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:¹



Ill-health



Fatigue



Digestive disorders



Sleep deprivation



Type 2 diabetes



Obesity

20%

of accidents on the road are caused by work fatigue.²

£115m to £240m

the cost to the UK annually due to fatigue-related accidents at work.³

1 in 9

people in the UK workforce work nights.⁴

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.

What can my organisation do?

- Consult with staff and reps on any changes and review shift patterns.
- Make sure risk assessments and personal emergency evacuation plans are up to date and regularly reviewed.
- Have agreed protocols to cover unplanned shifts.
- Promote healthy food to staff.
- Consider the impact of fatigue on patient safety.
- Comply with HSE management standards.⁵

What can my manager do?

- Ensure that night shift workers are offered free health assessments.
- Tailor risk assessments to individual needs.
- Allow adequate breaks within and between shifts.
- Consider the needs of vulnerable workers i.e. lone workers.

What can I do?

- Alert your manager to any wellbeing issues.
- Speak to your trade union health and safety representative.
- Take extra care when driving at night or during/following 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

1 Redeker et al., (2019), Workplace interventions to promote sleep health and an alert, healthy workforce jcsmaasm.org/doi/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

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

5 HSE Management Standards <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>

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