

Managing shift work to minimise fatigue

Workplace services



Department of Labour

TE TARI MAHI



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Why is it important to manage shift work well?

Shift work is one of the leading causes of fatigue. When people are tired they make mistakes and can put themselves and others in danger. Fatigue can also have a financial impact on a business.



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Causes of workplace fatigue

- **Shift work**

Shift work can lead to fatigue when it stops an employee getting enough sleep or requires an employee to work in the early hours of the morning, when people are normally at their sleepest.



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Causes of workplace fatigue

- **Night work**

Working at night has a greater impact than working the same number of hours in the daytime. Shift workers can lose 1-1.5 hours of sleep for each 24 hour period. So working more than three or four night shifts in a row is likely to cause a significant sleep debt.



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Causes of workplace fatigue

- **Long work hours**

Shifts that last longer than eight hours are considered to be extended shifts.

Continuing sleep restriction can affect cardiovascular health, mental health, safety and productivity.



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 **MANAGING FATIGUE**

 **SLEEP**

Sufficient sleep
High productivity
Healthy and safe environment

 **GOOD MANAGEMENT**

- Consulting with employees
- Working a safe number of hours
- Allowing enough recovery time between shifts
- Training and educating staff about fatigue management
- Good supervision
- Evaluating arrangements regularly

SHIFT WORK = FATIGUE

 **POOR MANAGEMENT**

- Not consulting with employees
- Working more than a safe numbers of hours
- Not allowing enough recovery time between shifts
- Not providing training and education about fatigue management
- Inadequate supervision
- Not evaluating arrangements

 **SLEEP**

Unhealthy and dangerous environment
Low productivity
Exhaustion



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WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- involve your employees
- work a safe numbers of hours
- allow enough recovery time between shifts
- train and educate staff
- provide good supervision when shifts are worked
- do high-risk tasks at safe times, or under special precautions
- monitor health where staff face significant hazards
- look out for staff who are not coping
- evaluate your arrangements from time to time



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THREE STEPS TO MANAGING WORKPLACE FATIGUE

Step one: Consultation

Talk to your staff about what works for them. This includes defining employer and employee responsibilities.



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Step two: Evaluation

Shift-working arrangements are a compromise between your need for work to continue at a time when people are normally asleep and your employees' need to take breaks during shifts and get enough sleep between shifts.

Work out how you can balance these needs. Bear in mind that the most successful roster might be the one that staff prefer.



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Step three: Training and education

Employers should:

- make sure staff take regular rest breaks during shifts
- make suitable food available to staff
- provide good supervision when shifts are worked
- know when people are likely to be affected by fatigue
- aim to manage shift work and overtime so employees have opportunities for adequate recovery
- if possible, allow employees longer periods off if they must sleep during the day
- be alert for the contribution of fatigue in incident investigations
- support staff as far as possible (and ask staff about the best way to do this)



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Step three: Training and education

Employees should know:

- what to eat and when
- the impact of caffeine and alcohol on sleep
- how to make the most of their breaks
- how to use their recovery and rest time appropriately
- how to adjust their sleeping area to promote good sleep
- how to recognise fatigue
- getting to and from work safely
- the impact of exercise on fatigue



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To learn more about the effective management of shift work in order to minimise fatigue, download and read -

Managing shift work to minimise fatigue – a guide for employers

Visit www.dol.govt.nz

