

Taking Care of Your Health

Strategies for Shiftworkers

Did You Know?

Disruption of circadian rhythms can interfere with the effectiveness of some medications. If you work a rotating or night shift, talk to your doctor about any necessary changes in your prescriptions.

Can't Sleep? Read This.

Shiftwork sleep disorder, or SWSD, occurs among people who sleep during the day and work at night. A person with SWSD may feel drowsy all the time, have a hard time concentrating or get frequent headaches. Work performance may suffer and the person may be irritable or moody. If you have trouble sleeping several nights a week, talk to your doctor. The best news about sleep disorders? They are **treatable**.

How Do You Measure Up?

Blood pressure is recorded as the ratio of two numbers — systolic pressure (as the heart beats) over diastolic pressure (as the heart relaxes between beats).

- Normal blood pressure is lower than 130/85
- Optimal blood pressure is lower than 120/80
- High blood pressure is higher than 140/90

Watch Out for the Silent Killer

Millions of people have high blood pressure, or hypertension, and many do not know it because hypertension often has no symptoms. That's why it's called the "silent killer."

High blood pressure puts you at risk for stroke and heart disease because it damages the arteries. It also can lead to complications such as kidney disease and blindness.

The good news: Although high blood pressure can't be cured, it can be prevented and controlled.

What to do:

1. **Know your risk.** Being overweight, having a family history of high blood pressure and being of African-American descent are some of the risk factors for hypertension, although it can affect anyone.
2. **Get tested.** Have your blood pressure measured by a doctor every 1–2 years. Blood pressure is usually tested during a routine checkup. The test is painless and only takes a few minutes.
3. **Practice prevention.** Make exercise part of your life (at least 30 minutes, 3–4 times a week), watch your fat and salt consumption, lose weight if you need to, and get regular checkups.
4. **Manage your condition.** If you have hypertension, take your medication (even if you feel fine) and follow the lifestyle changes suggested by your doctor.

Cool the (Stomach) Burn

Shiftworkers are at a higher risk for digestive problems such as heartburn, diarrhea, gas, abdominal pain and ulcers. But you don't have to suffer in silence. A few simple diet changes can help you avoid indigestion, sleep well and stay at your productive best throughout your shift.

Stick to a schedule. Keeping regular eating hours will help you avoid stomach problems.

Eat according to your shift. If you get off work early in the morning, a light breakfast (cereal, whole-grain toast or a fruit-and-yogurt shake) will digest easily and help you get restful sleep. If you're on the day shift, a larger morning meal will help you fuel up for the day ahead.

Eat light at night. Avoid heavy, greasy foods such as meats, fried foods, pastries, potato chips, pizza and whole-milk dairy products. These foods are hard to digest and may cause stomach problems when eaten late at night.

Avoid too much spice.

Your digestive system can be irritated by spicy or acidic foods and beverages, especially at night. The list of nightshift no-nos also includes chocolate, citrus fruits and juices, garlic, onions and peppers.

Limit caffeine and alcohol consumption.

Caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea and soda, and alcohol can increase heartburn symptoms.

Drink Up

Drinking 8–10 glasses of water per day can help you avoid heartburn and indigestion.

Heart-Healthy Help

Want to cut your risk of heart disease by more than 80 percent? A low-fat, high-fiber diet, active lifestyle and moderate drinking while avoiding smoking **all together** does the trick. You can even go further by trying these lesser-known strategies:

Take time out.

To feel your best, you must complete all the sleep stages 4–5 times during a sleep session. Each cycle takes about 90 minutes. Most experts say that people require 6–8 hours of sleep to function at their highest alertness and productivity levels, although some people may need more.

Pamper a pet. A study of stockbrokers being treated for high blood pressure found that those who had a cat or dog were half as likely to experience blood pressure surges when under stress as those who didn't have a pet.

Bet on "the Bs." Evidence has shown that folic acid, and vitamins B6 and B12 help lower homocysteine levels in the blood, which in turn lowers the risk of heart disease. **To get these Bs:** Eat a balanced diet that includes 5–7 fruits and vegetables a day and plenty of whole grains, including fortified bread.

Ask about aspirin. Studies have shown that regular doses of 81 mg "baby" aspirin can significantly lower your risk of heart attack. **Important:** Check with your doctor before trying "aspirin therapy" as it has many possible side effects, including stomach pain and bleeding.

