The Sleep Council is an impartial, advisory organisation that raises the awareness of the importance of a good night’s sleep to health and wellbeing and provides helpful advice and tips on how to improve sleep quality and create the perfect sleep environment.

www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

Sleep disruption and deprivation are primary factors resulting from shift work but it can affect other lifestyle factors too, such as eating and exercise.

Z You can help keep your biological clock tuned in to your sleep with anchor sleep. Aim to have at least four hours sleep at the same time every night/morning (e.g. 3-7am). This seems to help keep your sleep clock regular.

Z Use the weekend or days off to get in some extra “recovery” sleep.

Z Make sure the sleeping environment is as conducive to rest as possible. A comfortable bed in a dark, well-ventilated room, is essential. And when we say dark, we mean dark – invest in some black out curtains. If you work shifts, you really need to re-set that biological clock. Also, aim to cut out as much extraneous noise if possible: install double glazing; use ear plugs.

Z When it’s time to wake up you need light – special lamps which start with low level light and gradually get brighter help to speed up the biological clock once more and are a more pleasant way to wake up that with the shocking intrusion of an alarm clock!

Z Avoid stimulants (e.g. caffeine), large meals or vigorous exercise for at least four hours before going to bed. Also, avoid over-the-counter sleeping aids which may make you over sleepy when you need to be alert (driving home, for example)

Z The best bedtime snack is one that contains complex carbohydrates and protein and perhaps some calcium – which is why dairy products (yoghurt, milk) are top sleep-inducing foods.

Z If you’re an owl, you usually go to bed late and get up late, so shift work will be less of a problem than it is for larks, who prefer to get up early and go to bed early. Bright light in the evening (you can get light bulbs with a much higher lux value than ordinary, domestic bulbs) and avoiding the dawn light by wearing sunglasses can help.

Z Maximum sleepiness occurs when your biological clock temperature is at its lowest – usually around 4am. Your personal level of alertness is controlled by your biological clock and by how much sleep you have had. Remember sleeplessness leads to poor concentration, thinking, memory, increased irritability and hostility. Alcohol magnifies these effects.

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