

7 ways for surviving a nightshift

Due to the nature of working in the NHS, there may be times where you are working night shifts. Whether your job is a Nurse, Porter or Admin, and whether you are a night owl or early riser you will benefit from these seven life hacks that will help you cope with night shifts.

NHS Professionals strongly believe in having a work-life balance for wellbeing, working for the NHS through the bank is a fantastic way to ensure that you can pick the hours and shifts that suit your lifestyle. Remember to look after yourself as well as you do your patients!

The key to not just surviving but thriving on the night shift is to get adequate rest. Sleeping well during the day is essential.

1. Take a 30 minute nap*

Before your shift begins and, if possible, try to get in a 10-20 minute nap during your break. Short periods of rest will help keep your energy high but be sure not to sleep too long or you'll risk making yourself groggy.



2. Eat small portions throughout the shift

Instead of eating a giant meal right before your 12 hours on the ward, pack healthy snacks to eat throughout the night. Eating small snacks throughout your working "night" will help keep your energy up. Avoid fried, spicy or processed food as these are harder to digest and can leave you feeling lethargic. Instead, fill up on fruit, veg and slow release carbohydrates such as potatoes or pasta.



3. Limit your caffeine intake

Having a caffeinated drink before you begin your shift or earlier on into the night can give you a much-needed boost and help you to stay alert and awake. However, avoid drinking coffee, tea or fizzy drinks that contain caffeine later on in your shift, as they can make it difficult for you to fall asleep when you get home – thereby interrupting your sleep cycle.



4. Stay hydrated

Dehydration can leave you feeling fatigued because it affects the flow of oxygen to the brain and results in your heart having to work harder to then pump the oxygen around your body. This leaves you feeling more tired and a lot less alert. Drinking plenty of water throughout your shift will help you keep alert and energised.



5. Keep busy

While night shifts can typically be slower, Keeping your body moving will keep your blood flowing and mind awake. Try not clock-watch, as this can increase fatigue and make the night feel longer.



6. Talk with your co-workers

Who better to get you through your night shift than fellow night shifters? Not only will this help break up the shift and help keep you alert, but it's also a great way to share your knowledge and tips for surviving a night shift. Get tips for survival from night veterans and share some of your own too! Remember you're all in this together and part of the NHS family!



7. Sleep well

In order to function properly after a night shift, you ideally need 7 to 9 hours of sleep. Try and set aside this time during the day to help with your recovery. Put your phone on silent, draw the curtains to make the room as dark and as quiet as possible to mimic night-time, and have a quick drink and snack before you hit the sack.



*NB: Both NHSP and client trusts designate sleeping on duty as gross misconduct – with many trusts dismissing staff at the first recorded incidence. Sometimes specific areas of nursing bring their own demands in terms of vigilance around tiredness and fatigue. For example, undertaking the close observation of a patient.