



March 2011

## In This Issue

### Risks of working at night

- Hazards and disadvantages associated with night shift work
- I can't change my job, so what can I do?

Advantage EAP offers expanded hours in the New River Valley!!!

Advantage EAP has added additional hours in Radford at 22 Montgomery Street. Call 1-800-699-9396

Helpful online Resources (and articles where this information was retrieved) may be found at the bottom of this newsletter.

## Risks of working at night



While nearly 15 million Americans work a permanent night shift or regularly rotate in and out of night shifts, the hazards the shifts can play on the body can put those workers, along with others, in danger. These night shifts affect not only cognitive performance, but also can impair safety judgments. This newsletter hopes to offer some explanation behind the risks of night work, as well as some solutions to the problems at hand.

### Hazards and disadvantages associated with night shift work<sup>1</sup>

Knowing about our bodies natural rhythms is an important part in understanding why there are such hazards associated with night shift work. Working at night actually runs counter to the body's natural circadian rhythm. The circadian clock is basically our body's timer that allows glands to know when to release hormones and also controls mood, alertness, body temperature and other aspects of our body's daily cycle. People who work the night shift are fighting the body's natural cycle which helps our brains to relax at night and then bounce back in the morning. This makes it especially dangerous for those who work high-risk jobs at night. Jobs that require high alertness or split-second decisions can be especially dangerous because they are working against their body's natural cycles and fatigue often set in at night. Night workers can suffer from fatigue, which then affects mood and typically decreases cognitive ability and makes a person more vulnerable to disease.

Studies have also shown that individuals working at night are more likely to be at risk for heart disease, gastrointestinal disorders, mood disorders and neurological disorders. It's important for persons working at night to help their body adjust to the night shift and the ability to take care of themselves is imperative.

Working the night shift also means that you may be at a social disadvantage as well. Typically, social aspects are stressed when working at night and it takes extra interest in making your social relationships work. Also it is possible that night-shift employees will not be as competitive as those who work daytime shifts. There is less of an advantage to connect with employers as well less benefit of performance evaluation.

## Locations:

2727 Electric Road, Ste 100  
Roanoke, VA 24018

200 Professional Park Drive  
Unit 1  
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Alleghany Regional Hospital  
1 ARH Lane, Room 529  
Low Moor, VA 24457

22 Montgomery Street  
Radford, VA 24141

## Contact Us:

Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30-  
5:00pm. Evening hours are  
available on a limited basis.

(540) 989-6605 or 800-699-  
9396

Nights and weekends call  
RESPOND:

(540) 776-1100 or 800-541-  
9992

Advantage EAP does not  
necessarily endorse any  
products or services  
mentioned

## I can't change my job, so what can I do?

We realize that changing your job shift really isn't an option in most cases, so it's important to look at what you can change to help adapt your schedule to help you stay cognitively aware, as well as physically safe.



The following are some tips to follow to help keep you keep safe (and healthy) while working the night shift:

- **Shift the body's circadian clock<sup>1</sup>**- research has shown that you can shift your body's natural clock by two hours. By making sure to have bright light at work, wearing sunglasses on your way home from work, and sleeping in dark bedrooms, some researchers have found that they were able to shift the circadian rhythm to adjust to working at night (this shift works typically only for those who work with a permanent night shift schedule).
- **Sleep and eat well before your shift**- Try to eat your meals at the same time each day, and don't eat at the end of your shift, as it's hard for the body to digest food when sleeping.
- **Have sleep preparation rituals that promote good sleep practice**- have the same "go-to-sleep" music that you listen to every night or something that will help your mind to know that it's now time relax and sleep.
- **Invest in sleep-masks, black-out curtains, ear-plugs or a white noise machine**- if you can't sleep think about investing in one or more of these items to help ensure that you can sleep during the day.
- **Don't forget the importance of exercise, no matter your work shift**- even just 30 minutes of exercise at least three times a week will typically help to fight stress and being "mentally tired", as well as have physical benefits.
- **Keep a social life**- It's important to keep a social life even when working the night shift, because being socially isolated can make it easy to become down or depressed. Also keeping hobbies is important as well, as it may help to socially connect you to others.
- **Avoid caffeine towards the end of the shift**- It's important that you stay away from caffeine towards the end of your shift to help your body become ready to sleep as soon as you get off work.
- **Inform your friends and family**- By letting your friends and family know you are working the night shift you can let them know when to contact

you, as well as making sure they know you may need extra support or help while working the night shift.

**Advantage EAP is a benefit provided by your employer. There are counselors with Advantage EAP who have the training and experience to help with a variety of issues, including those under job-related stress.**

**Please contact your Advantage EAP at:**

**(540) 989-6605 or 800-699-9396**

**Or visit our website at: [www.psychhealthroanoke.com](http://www.psychhealthroanoke.com)**

**Or our Blog at: <http://psychhealthroanoke.blogspot.com/>**

**Resources:**

- 1) **Information retrieved from:** Price, M. (2011, January). The risks of night work . *Monitor on psychology*, 42(1), 39-41.

**Helpful Online Sites:**

- 1) <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/workschedules/>
- 2) <http://www.circadian.com/>
- 3) <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/shift-work/AN01616>