



# Sleep & Shift Work

## Tip Sheet

### How can shift work affect me?

Shift work can provide flexibility and variety which many people enjoy. The hours that paramedics work can be challenging both physically and mentally. The body is synchronised to night and day by a circadian clock. Physiological functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, temperature, digestion and brain activity, fluctuate over each 24-hour period, under the guidance of our circadian rhythms. Doing shift work can confuse this system. One of the biggest risk factors for shift workers is managing fatigue.

Research into sleep and shift work suggests that shift workers have increased risk for physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, and connection to others, if we do not actively try to mitigate the impact of the shift work.

To mitigate the risks of shift work, shift workers are able to implement lifestyle strategies that can support both their physical and mental health.

### What can I do about it?

- Make time for enough sleep. Have good sleep routines, irrespective of time of sleep.
- Plan ahead: can you manage your rosters around special events that are significant to you.
- Work hard on having a good sleep environment. This may mean removing phones from the bedroom and having heavy carpet and curtains in the bedroom to help absorb any noise. Some shift workers find that wearing ear plugs helps.
- A fan or "white noise" machine will help to muffle noise. Keep the bedroom cool and dark.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes or strenuous exercise 4 hours before going to bed.
- If you can, sleep just before going to work. This is better than earlier in the day. If this is not possible, taking a nap before going to work may help may improve your alertness and ability to concentrate.

*The Ambulance Victoria Wellbeing & Support Services is AV's internal mental health support service available 24/7 to all employees and their immediate family members, RANs, ACO's and CERTs providing 24-hour mental health and wellbeing support.*

### Using sleep medication

Many people who work shift work try to manage sleep difficulties using medication. Whilst it can be an effective short term measure, medium to long term measures should involve behavioural strategies.

If you are using sleep medications, a regular review with is recommended.

If you are struggling with sleep, you can also contact 1800 626 377 (1800 MANERS) to speak with a Peer Support, Chaplain or VACU Clinician.

Psychologists can talk to you about behavioural strategies that could be effective in managing sleep difficulties.

### When and where to seek support

You might seek professional support if you are:

- Excessively fatigued all the time.
- Not getting enough sleep to stay safe at work and at home.
- Feel frustrated by your sleeping difficulties and impact on your mood.



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### What are some good sleep habits?

- Taking time to relax and unwind when you get home from your shift
- Meals should be timed to avoid going to bed on a full stomach, but not hungry either.
- Sleep when you start to doze so you don't spend too much time lying in bed awake.
- If you are not asleep after 30 minutes in bed, go to a quiet, dark and warm spot until you feel tired again and then go back to bed.
- Daylight will wake you up by switching off your sleep hormone melatonin. Darkness will help you become sleepy. Aim to get sunlight when you first wake up, and keep your sunglasses on when you are coming home from a shift in daylight.

### If I do nap how long should I nap for?

When you feel sleepy, it is best to nap for 20 minutes. This will improve your alertness and concentration. A longer nap of 40 minutes will leave you feeling groggy, and less alert.

- Having difficulty switching off your mind when you are trying to go to sleep.

### Support can be accessed via

1800 626 377 (1800 MANAGERS) to access:

- Peer Support
- Chaplain
- VACU

- Self-referral via the AV intranet to access the [list of Wellbeing and Support Services' approved Clinicians](#).
- Your local GP

### Websites such as:

[Better Health - Vic government](#)

[The Sleep Foundation](#)

[The Sleep Foundation- fact sheets](#)

### Want to Learn More?

To hear more about this important area of wellbeing, tune onto the **AV Podcast series** episode on **Sleep**. In this episode Dr David Cunnington, co-director of Melbourne Sleep Disorders Centre, specialist sleep physician, researcher, and advocate, shares his insights into the area of sleep, rest, and the role of mindfulness in getting a good enough night's sleep.

**1800 MANAGERS**  
1800 626 377

**Option**

- 1 Peer Support**  
Talk to a caring, trained colleague who understands your experiences.  
[peer.support@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:peer.support@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- 2 VACU Counselling Line**  
Confidential telephone support from a qualified counsellor (24/7).  
Find your nearest VACU Network Clinician.  
[vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- 3 AV Chaplain**  
AV's Chaplains provide compassionate support for your emotional, spiritual and pastoral care needs. This is a non-denominational service for everyone.  
[chaplain@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:chaplain@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- 4 Bullying and Harassment**  
Confidential support and advice about bullying or harassment.  
[ProfessionalConductUnit@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:ProfessionalConductUnit@ambulance.vic.gov.au)
- 5 Police Statements & Court Attendance**  
Get help with police statements or an upcoming court appearance.
- 6 Alcohol and Other Drugs Advice and Support**  
Talk with AV's AOD advisor about your options for support (8am-5pm).  
[AOD@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:AOD@ambulance.vic.gov.au)