









EMPLOYEE SERIES

Tips for working a longer work roster

These uncertain times have created a number of emotional, financial, social, health and work related issues. You might have found that as a result, you are now required to work additional hours and spend less time with your loved ones. Below are some tips to help you cope best you can with these changes.

-  **Ensuring you have quality sleep.** Getting a good sleep means working with your body clock, not against it. Getting up at the same time every day is important. Soon this strict routine will help to 'set' your body clock and you will find yourself getting sleepy at about the same time every night.
-  **Don't ignore tiredness.** Go to bed when your body tells you it's ready. Don't go to bed if you don't feel tired. You will only reinforce bad habits such as lying awake.
-  **Get enough early morning sunshine.** Exposure to light during early waking hours helps to set your body clock.
-  **Ensure that your bedroom is comfortable for sleeping.** Invest in a mattress that is neither too hard nor too soft. Make sure you pay attention to all your senses. This can be done by making sure the room is at the right temperature, ensuring the room is dark enough for sleeping and there is little to no noise. If you can't control noise (such as barking dogs or loud neighbors), buy a pair of earplugs.
-  **Don't self-medicate.** Some people resort to medications or 'social drugs' in the mistaken belief that sleep will be more likely. Common pitfalls include;
 - Cigarettes: Many smokers claim that cigarettes help them relax, yet nicotine is a stimulant. The side effects, including accelerated heart rate and increased blood pressure, are likely to keep you awake for longer.
 - Alcohol: Alcohol is a depressant drug, which means it slows the workings of the nervous system. Drinking before bed may help you doze off but, since alcohol disturbs the rhythm of sleep patterns, you won't feel refreshed in the morning. Other drawbacks include waking frequently to go to the toilet and hangovers.
 - Sleeping pills: Drawbacks include daytime sleepiness, failure to address the causes of sleeping problems.
-  **Relax your mind: Insomnia is often caused by worrying.** If you are a chronic bedtime worrier, try scheduling a half hour of 'worry time' well before bed. Once you retire, remind

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yourself that you've already done your worrying for the day. Try relaxation exercises. You could consciously relax every part of your body, starting with your toes and working up to your scalp. Or you could think of a restful scene, concentrate on the rhythmic rise and fall of your breathing, or focus on a mantra (repeating a word or phrase constantly).



Lifestyle adjustments. Some changes to your day to day routine may help improve your sleep include:

- Exercise every day, but not close to bedtime and try not to overheat yourself – your body needs time to wind down;
- Try not to engage in mentally stimulating activities close to bedtime. Use the last hour or so before sleep to relax your mind. Don't take afternoon naps;
- Avoid caffeinated drinks (like tea, coffee, cola or chocolate) close to bedtime. Instead, have a warm, milky drink, since milk contains a sleep-enhancing amino acid.
- Take a warm bath;
- Turn your alarm clock to the wall. Watching the minutes tick by is a sure way to keep yourself awake.



When you have trouble falling asleep. If you can't fall asleep within a reasonable amount of time, get out of bed and do something else for half an hour or so, such as reading a book. If you have tried and failed to improve your sleep, you may like to consider professional help. See your doctor for information and referral.



Maintain Social Connections and Support. Remember during these times you need to keep up with social connections and support. This could be achieved by:

- Helping your children with school work.
- Engaging in multi-player word games online.
- Using "Face time" or video calling.
- Preparing yourself to be in the right mindset when you have contact with your family, how to ask questions and open conversation so you build and maintain your relationships



Daily affirmation or reflective practices. It is important to also engage in positive cognitive strategies to maintain your mental health during this time. This could include:

- Focusing on the positives of the work you doing.
- Completing daily positive affirmations that help to inspire you to keep going.



- Remembering the reason that you are doing working– reminding yourself of why you are there and what you are achieving.
- Positive future planning – thinking of fun activities you can do when work has slowed down a bit or when you have planned leave



Use time effectively and maintain your routine. When combined with the use of positive self-talk, time management techniques can have a lasting impact on work- related stress. Some skills for time management include:

- Beginning the work day by reviewing or planning for the day's events, including breaks for resting and eating.
- Keeping a 'to-do' list and prioritising tasks according to urgency or importance.
- Minimising distractions and interruptions (for example, turning off email alerts).
- Learning to say 'no' to requests outside of one's immediate work responsibilities.
- Delegating responsibilities to others where appropriate.
- Planning your time at home to utilise the time you have– balanced with rest and relaxation and not pressuring the family to do what you want – can be difficult to reintegrate after time away.

*References – betterhealth.vic.gov & Australian Psychology Society:
<https://www.psychology.org.au/for-the-public/Psychology-topics/Stress-in-the-workplace>*

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