

Sleep Guide for Shift Workers

Fire · EMS · Law Enforcement · Dispatch · Nursing

Shift work fights your body clock. You can't fix that completely — but you can stack the odds. *(Based on CDC/NIOSH shift-work guidance.)*

1. Protect a sleep window

- Pick a sleep window and **guard it** like a call-out.
- Keep it **as consistent as you can**, even on days off (or shift it by an hour or two, not 10).
- Tell your household your window. Phones on **Do Not Disturb** (allow emergency contacts).

2. After a night shift

- Go to bed **soon after you get home** — don't stay up all day.
- Wear **sunglasses** on the drive home (morning light tells your brain "wake up").
- Skip the heavy meal and alcohol before bed. A light snack is fine.
- Can't sleep after 20–30 minutes? Get up, do something calm in dim light, try again.

3. Build a "cave"

- **Dark:** blackout curtains or sleep mask (a red/dim night light for bathroom trips).
- **Quiet:** earplugs or white noise; put a "Sleeping — please don't ring" sign on the door.
- **Cool:** a cooler room helps most people sleep.

4. Use light, caffeine and naps on purpose

Tool	Do	Don't
Light	Bright light early in the night shift to stay alert	Bright light and screens right before sleep
Caffeine	Early in the shift	In the last several hours before bed
Naps	A short nap before a night shift can help	Long naps that leave you groggy
Alcohol	—	It may make you drowsy but ruins sleep quality

5. Quick wind-down (10 minutes)

1. Dim lights.
2. Box breathing × 4 rounds.
3. Write tomorrow's top 3 (get it out of your head).
4. Phone out of arm's reach.

6. Safety

- **Drowsy driving is dangerous.** If you're fighting to stay awake — pull over, nap, or get a ride.
- Chronic insomnia, loud snoring with gasping, heavy daytime sleepiness, or nightmares for weeks? **Talk to a doctor.** These are treatable.

7. Sleep and mental health

Poor sleep makes stress, mood and anger harder to manage. If sleep trouble comes with hopelessness, nightmares from calls, or increased drinking — that's a reason to reach out.

Safe Call Now (206) 459-3020 · Call/text 988 · Text HOME to 741741 · Emergency: 911