

Understanding Sleep

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SLEEP?

Let's first consider the mechanics of sleep. There are two sleep states: REM and non-REM. Non-REM sleep has four stages; stages one and two are lighter, whereas stages three and four are deeper and more restorative. REM is where our dreams happen and during this stage of sleep, our breathing and heart rate increase and become irregular, our muscles relax and our eyes move back and forward.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'SLEEP DISORDERS'?

There are multiple sleep 'disorders' including insomnia (trouble falling or staying asleep), obstructive sleep apnea (stopping breathing periodically through the night), narcolepsy (overwhelming daytime drowsiness and sudden attacks of sleep), restless limb syndrome (the feeling of spiders crawling on your limbs), periodic limb movements (regular, repetitive muscle movements during sleep), and circadian rhythm disorders (our sleep-wake cycle is not aligned with our environment and interferes with our activities), of which one is shift work sleep disorder.

Across the general population, sleep apnea and insomnia are the most common sleep disorders, however many in the hospitality industry may be more familiar with shift work sleep disorder.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF SHIFT WORK SLEEP DISORDER?

The two primary symptoms of shift work sleep disorder are insomnia and excessive sleepiness. People with shift work disorder can have trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep, depending on the hours of their shift. Shift workers can also often feel fatigue and reduced alertness while at work or in the early hours of the morning. This is more the excessive sleepiness - feeling the urge to nap at inappropriate times.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COMBAT SHIFT WORK SLEEP DISORDER?

If this is an issue for you - it may be worth consulting with a Sleep Psychologist. However, there are also a few points to consider:

- Make time for enough sleep - don't short-change yourself or set your alarm earlier than you need to wake up.
- Try to sleep in peace. Put your phone on silent or switch off altogether, install black out blinds or carpet to prevent the carry of noise through the house.
- Have a pleasant sleeping environment - a cool, dark room, comfy bed and pillow, enough airflow in the warmer weather.
- Avoid any stimulants such as coffee, energy drinks, alcohol,

cigarettes in the hour or two 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 and up to 90 minutes can be valuable.

AND FOR MANAGERS?

Try to avoid rostering people on too many back-to-back shifts, if at all possible, as the longer the routine is in place, the more issues are likely to occur.

In a perfect world, people would stay on the same shift, rather than rotate between day, afternoon/evening and night. However, this is not always realistic or practical. If shifts do need to change, consider the possibility of moving them forward rather than backwards. For example, moving a staff member from a morning to afternoon to night, rather than an afternoon back to a morning shift.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

These questions are designed to prompt team discussion and interaction following the podcast:

- What are some of the biggest concerns that people have about their sleep?
- Do people rely enough on napping?
- What would help to improve our sleeping patterns or habits?