

NOW YOU ARE A NIGHT OWL: HINTS AND TIPS ON SURVIVING THE NIGHT SHIFT

Your first employment opportunity as a new graduate nurse may have you working the night shift – defined as either working 11 PM to 7 AM or 7 PM to 7 AM. Either time period places people at risk for decreased socialization, depression, sleep disruption, somatic complaints, emotional exhaustion, and general life disruption.⁵ There are, however, ways to mitigate the effects of working the night shift.

1. **Sleep is A Top Priority**¹⁻⁴

No getting around this one – sleep comes first, over and above everything else. Don't go shopping, visit your parents or friends, or make appointments. Allow your body to relax before going to bed, but Go-To-Bed! You must get a solid 7 to 8 hours of sleep in order to provide safe and high quality patient care. Here are some methods of tricking your internal clock so you can sleep during the day light hours:

- Establish a sleep schedule and stick to it
- Sleep in the quietest room in your living environment
- Keep the room at a comfortable temperature
- Darken the room with black-out shades or thick curtains. A sleep mask can be helpful.
- Use a white noise machine to block-out traffic, voices, trains, airplanes, etc. Or wear ear plugs.
- Disconnect phones and other electronics! Trust that the world will still exist when you wake up (just like at night). See Page 2 for further advice.

2. **Understand Your Circadian Clock and Its Rhythms**¹⁻³

Your body is programmed to sleep at night. Sleep cravings kick in between 12 AM and 6 AM. Learn your internal clock and track its own natural rhythms. Keeping the lights bright in the work area (but low in patient areas) can block the natural tendency to sleep. Adjusting your circadian clock can assist in counteracting the physical effects of night shift such as fatigue and drowsiness.

3. **Use Caffeinated Beverages Wisely**¹⁻⁴

Having a caffeinated beverage before starting your shift or early in the evening can keep you alert and focused. Avoid drinking tea, coffee, and other caffeinated beverages throughout the shift – eventually it will interrupt your sleep cycle and contribute to sleep deprivation.

4. **Eat Healthy Meals and Snacks**¹⁻⁴

Stay away from that vending machine! Sometimes hospital cafeterias are closed during the night shift and/or do not offer wise food options. Pack your own food for work to help you avoid these temptations. If you order fast food with co-workers, lean towards options such as fresh sandwiches, broiled foods, or salads. And we won't even talk about sugary drinks, eh?

5. **Stay Active and Continue to Exercise**^{2,3}

Adhering to an active lifestyle while working the night shift will help you avoid using pills, alcohol, and other substances to induce sleep (See Page 2 for further information). It can also thwart weight gain, which is a risk for this shift. Activity also impacts Hint #6...

6. **Monitor Your Health and Your Mood**¹⁻³

Depression can be an effect of shift work. Extroverts may miss the social contact. Lack of exercise and adequate sunlight are other factors that can trigger depression and mood swings. Ensure you maintain contact with friends and family *after* you have slept and on your days off. Exposure yourself to sunlight every day and when you are not working. Light lamps can help. Keep track of your mood, monitor your health, and make adjustments.

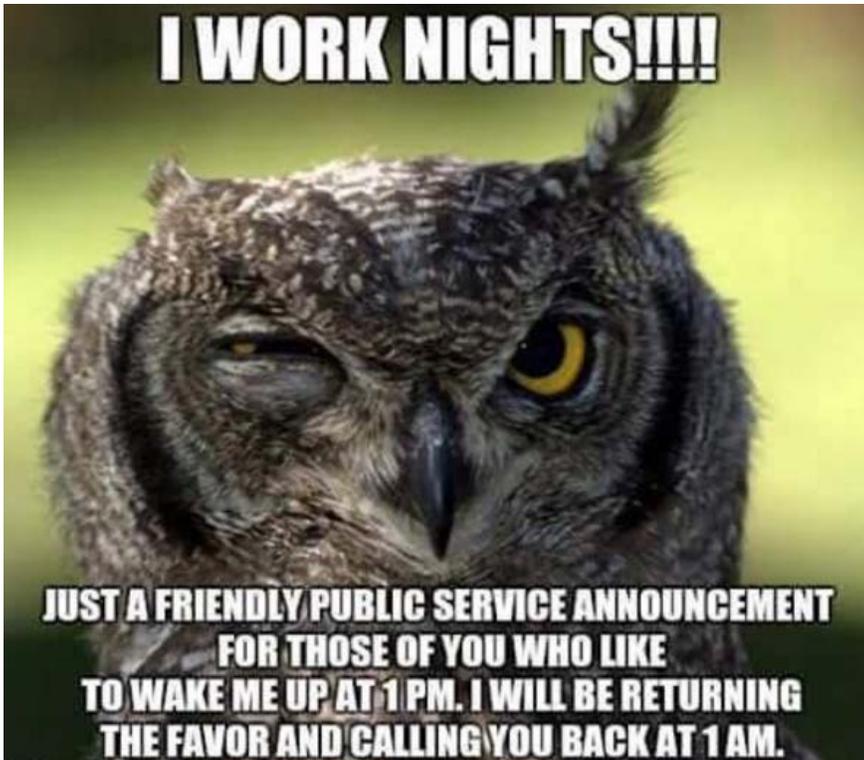
7. **Bond with Co-Workers and Become Visible**¹⁻³

Forming a collegial bond with your team members will go a long way towards providing some of the socialization you might be missing. After your orientation and preceptorship, find a mentor! He or she can guide and nurture you as a novice nurse. Volunteer for taskforces, committees, and unit activities – this makes you visible to administrators, managers, and others working the day light hours and can assist in advancing your professional career.

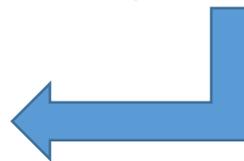
You CAN survive the night shift if you prepare yourself, your family, and friends for this new nursing adventure. I was a night nurse for 19 years and loved this shift. Try incorporating of some of these hints and see if they make a difference. But the first step on this journey is to put yourself and your life needs FIRST!

References

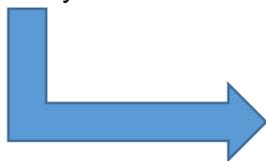
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2. EveryNurse.org (n.d.). Survival tips for nurses working the night shift. *EveryNurse*. Available at: <http://everynurse.org/survival-tips-nurses-working-night-shift/>
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4. Ross, B. (2011). The first time: Surviving the night shift. *Nursing Times*. Available at: <https://www.nursingtimes.net/student-nt/the-first-time-surviving-the-night-shift/5027663.article>
5. West, S. J., Ahern, M., Byrnes, M., & Kwanten, L. (2007). New graduate nurses adaptation to shift work: Can we help? *Collegian*, 14(1), 23-30.



Hint #1: Although it might be extremely tempting, try not to do this...



Hint #5: Wouldn't you rather run 2 miles on your days off and avoid pills? Maybe now is the time to train for that half marathon on your bucket list!



Believe it or not, this is a real product from the United Kingdom – used as a sleep aid for colds and flu. This are also Day Nurse capsules!

