

Work Demands

Work Demands include things like....

Workload - the amount and type of work to be done in a work day

Number of jobs - Working more than one job or shift, being on call, contract and temporary work

Hours of work - Number of hours (too much or too little) and overtime expectations

Job requirements - Includes both physical and mental demands of the job(s) as well as level of responsibility, unclear job role and/or job expectations

Shiftwork - Work demands that include working outside of daytime hours, i.e., evenings, nights, rotating or irregular shifts, split shifts, being on-call, working multiple jobs, contract work and temporary work

Why should you care?

- Work demands have an impact on the mental and physical health of employees
- Fatigue and other health problems resulting from work demands will affect productivity, increase turnover and create unsafe situations on the job
- Working outside regular daytime hours can cause stress, anxiety, sleep difficulties, digestive problems and strained relationships
- Eventually excessive work demands could lead to more serious health problems including, some cancers, heart disease, burnout, substance abuse, relationship breakdown

Everyone shares the responsibility for creating and maintaining a healthy workplace and reducing the impact of work demands.

Improvements can be made at the organizational and individual level.

Organizational level—through the design of the work schedules, consideration of job demands, education, and supportive environments.

Individual level—by getting a better sleep, eating a healthier diet, learning to recognize signs of stress and reducing stress through relaxation, physical activity, attention to work-life balance strategies etc.

To reduce the negative effects of job demands, employers should try to provide a supportive workplace environment that includes,

- ensuring a safe working environment
- proper lighting and ventilation
- a clean place to eat and rest
- opportunities or facilities for physical activity
- a culture that ensures trust, respect and good communication between all employees

Start the Conversation – What aspects of your workplace are impacting the physical and mental health of your employees?

Shiftwork at the Organizational level: Many organizations require employees to work around the clock! Shift Work has both advantages and disadvantages but it does present special challenges for the organization and the employees.

Some ideas to consider...

- Encourage employees to be involved in the input of work scheduling and support flexible hours. Allow flexibility for shift changes (between employees).
- Rotate shifts forward/ clockwise (e.g. days to evenings to nights).
- Consider having access to child care as an available option.
- Have healthy food options available for employees.
- Early morning shifts are associated with less sleep and more tiredness. Try to avoid starting shifts as early as 5 or 6 am.
- Develop shifts that allow for use of public transportation.
- Plan ahead for times when production demands result in large amounts of overtime work.
- Inform employees of their schedule well in advance, so they can plan social time with family and friends.
- Keep work schedules as simple and predictable as possible.
- Reduce the number of night shifts per person. The more consecutive nights worked, the more rest time should be allowed before the next rotation occurs.
- Allow for a rest period of at least 24 hours after each set of night shifts.
- Provide places for rest if possible.
- Provide bright lighting for night-time workers.
- Offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to help workers cope with work demands.
- Host a shiftwork /sleep hygiene education session so employees and their families can understand the challenges and develop solutions.

Your employees are most productive when well rested!

Shift Work at the Individual level – some ideas to consider...

- Learn about sleep patterns and recognise *your* sleep patterns. Explore ideas that will help you sleep
- Develop a routine for sleeping and stick with the routine. Inform family and friends of the sleep routine
- Develop regular bedtime hours and wear appropriate comfortable clothes to sleep
- Wear sunglasses on the drive home, turn off phones, do not answer the door bell, reduce the sound of traffic and children playing – wear ear plugs, install sound proofing or have a constant soft noise running in the background (air conditioner, fan etc.)
- Control the temperature in the bedroom and find what is comfortable for you to sleep
- Keep regular eating patterns as much as possible (e.g. still eat with family at dinner time just alter the amount of food)
- Time meals carefully. Employees who work afternoons should eat the main meal in the middle of the day. Night shift employees should eat lightly throughout the shift and have a moderate breakfast
- Avoid eating greasy foods while working nights. Snack on nuts, crackers, fruit, and vegetables during the shift rather than sweets and pop. Avoid caffeine and tobacco too close to bedtime.
- Be sure to remain physically active. Time your physical activity for *after* your sleep period or during your shift, not just before going to bed. Take time to relax before going to bed
- If possible, avoid using medications to sleep: the drowsiness often continues long after the sleep period
- If you have trouble waking up go outside – fresh air and sunshine help you to wake up

Talk with co-workers to share ideas about coping with different schedules and work demands

Information adapted from....

- Canadian centre for occupational health and safety. (2010, November 10). *Rotational shiftwork*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/shiftwrk>.
- Higgins, C., Duxbury, L., & Lyons, S. (2010). Coping with overload and stress: men and women in dual-earner families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(4), 847-859.
- Shapiro, C., Heselgrave, R., Beyers, J., & Picard, L. (1997). *Working the shift - a self-health guide*. Chris Ward and associates.