

What coping strategies for night-shifts help undergraduate nursing students maintain alertness when working these shifts?

Introduction: The nature of night shift means being awake when everyone else is asleep, this can interfere with circadian rhythms including: 'normal sleep/wake cycles, alertness, memory, dexterity and reaction times' (Darby, 1998). Providing nursing care throughout the night is considered to be a necessary and valuable part of student training. Good preparation for your night shift includes: adequate rest and good nutrition as well as getting regular exercise.

Sleep

- ⇒ Bedrooms should be free from distractions such as computers and televisions.
- ⇒ Use room-darkening or blackout shades in your bedroom.
- ⇒ Ear plugs and eye-masks help to reduce noise and block light.
- ⇒ Mobiles should be off or on silent.
- ⇒ Let flatmates and family know when you will be sleeping so you are not disturbed.
- ⇒ Have a 30-90 minute power nap before leaving for work on night shift if needed.
- ⇒ Bedrooms should be a cool temperature (Garbarino, Et Al, 2002).

Nutrition/Exercise

- ⇒ When you wake up, go outside and get some sunlight, this has the effect of increasing alertness.
- ⇒ When working nights eat lightly throughout your shift. Wholegrain cereals, fruit and vegetables, chicken/ fish, low fat milk yoghurt and cheese are recommended.
- ⇒ Drink water to stay hydrated and alert.
- ⇒ Avoiding coffee and energy drinks towards the end of your shift.
- ⇒ Avoid vending machines, foods are usually high in calories and fat (Pronitis - Ruotolo, 2001).
- ⇒ Exercising regularly helps the body tolerate shift work (SDHB, 2006).

Staying Awake

- ⇒ Stand and walk around regularly.
- ⇒ Contact others on the same shift, this helps keep you and them more alert.
- ⇒ Washing hands and wetting your face can be refreshing.
- ⇒ Bright light of a desk lamp or overhead light may help increase alertness.
- ⇒ A short nap during a break can maintain vigilance and increase alertness. (Peate, 2007).
- ⇒ When driving home from work use sunglasses to block light.
- ⇒ Avoid using the car heater to prevent 'drowsy driving' (SDBH, 2006).

Conclusion: Night shift can be a wonderful learning opportunity for nursing students to experience. Although they can be tiring and require some lifestyle adjustment, the advantages of night shifts for students can include having time to learn new skills and preceptors having more time to teach students. There are a number of coping strategies students can employ for helping them adapt to working a night shift, potentially reducing fatigue and enhancing safety.

PECOT

PECOT Category	Information Relating to Question	Explanation
Population	Nursing Students	Students often have little experience at night shift work.
Exposure	Nursing students often do night shifts on their elective placements	I will be looking for articles that look at coping strategies for students who work a night shift.
Comparison	Nurses who regularly work night shifts.	What difference does having experience of working night shifts make to coping with the shift, in comparison to having no experience?
Outcome	Coping strategies help maintain alertness during night shift	Does having knowledge about coping strategies for night shift improve student nurses ability to maintain alertness during this shift?
Time	Night shifts that start after 8pm and end before 8am, overnight.	Between these hours is the normal start and finish times for a nursing night shift.

Reference:

Schneider, Z., Whitehead., D. (2013). Identifying research ideas, questions, statement & hypotheses. In Z. Schneider, D. Whitehead, G. LoBiondo-Wood, & J. Haber. Schneider, Z., Whitehead., D. Nursing and midwifery research methods and appraisal for evidence – based practice (4th ed.). (pp. 57-76). Sydney, Australia: Mosby.