

## 7 TIPS FOR SHIFT WORKING PARENTS



*Life can be tough for working parents, even in the best of circumstances, but shift work can bring with it its own set of challenges. We've put together seven top tips to help if you're juggling family and shift work.*

### 1. Take Care of Yourself

Long shifts, unsociable hours or working through the night can be exhausting. You're probably used to putting your children's needs ahead of your own, but it's important to remember that if you want to be the best version of yourself, both at home and at work, you need to make taking care of yourself a top priority. Eating healthy meals and snacks, exercising regularly and getting plenty of rest when you can is critical.

### 2. Routine

Try to find a work routine that works for you - lumping shifts together so that your body can get into a rhythm will help you feel less tired and will enable you to have some days off to enjoy with your family. Many childcare providers can be flexible, but having a set shift pattern if possible gives both you and your child a sense of routine, which helps mentally and physically.

In preparation for your night shift, try to take a nap during the day. If your children are little and still having naps, take a nap with them, if they're at nursery or school, try to have a nap before you pick them up.

### **3. Prep Your Sleep Environment**

If you work nights and need to sleep during the day, no matter how tired you might be it's not easy, especially with family at home. We are naturally programmed to be awake during the day and asleep at night, so it means fighting against one of your body's most basic instincts. To help your body sleep when you need to sleep, try to control light exposure. During night shifts, you can try to "trick" your body into an alert state with exposure to bright light, and promote sleep by suppressing light exposure after your shift. Use blackout blinds, curtains, or a sleep mask to block out daylight in your bedroom and limit screen time before you go to bed. Keeping your bedroom dark will help to keep your body in sleep mode until it is time for you to wake up and begin your day.

If your home can be noisy during the daytime, set boundaries with family members (including your children) to ensure that you are able to get the rest you need, and if that doesn't always work, get some good ear plugs! Listening to white noise can help and if you find it hard to switch off, try some relaxing breathing exercises. Remember to set your phone to 'do not disturb' and let family and friends know your shift pattern and when you'll be unavailable due to catching up on those all-important zzzs!

### **4. Meal Plan**

When typical daily rhythm is thrown off balance, so too is metabolism. Having a good diet and planning your meals can help you stay alert during your working hours and be more relaxed when you need to sleep. On your days off, batch cook some healthy meals so that you have meals ready in the freezer. This will help you and your family to keep a balanced diet and stay away from 'easy' but perhaps less nutritious ready meals. (It'll also take some of the stress away when everyone is 'staaaarving!')

### **5. Keep Hydrated**

It's easy to reach for caffeinated drinks when feeling tired, but try to avoid drinking too much of them. Staying hydrated and drinking plenty of water will help physical and mental performance.

### **6. Be Organised**

Planning ahead with meals, online food shopping and scheduling housework will get you in a routine and help you feel in control and on top of things. Getting school or nursery bags packed and ready ahead of when they're needed will help to limit the last minute panic when leaving the house.

### **7. Ask for Help**

If you have family or friends who are able to help – reach out, they won't necessarily know you need help unless you ask. If you have a trusted friend in a similar situation, maybe think about a 'care-share' arrangement where you can help each other out with regular childcare. Adding more children to your

home might not seem like it'll help, but sometimes it's actually easier – they often entertain each other, taking the pressure off you.

Not all of us have friends and family who are able to help, if that's the case, look at whether there are professional childcare options that would suit your shift pattern. Many nurseries can offer flexible hours to accommodate shift workers, so ask your local nursery what options are available.

Alternatively, if you'd rather have your children cared for at home or need out-of-hours help, maybe consider hiring a nanny, nanny housekeeper or babysitter – these could be good options if you also need help with household chores, have several children or older children.

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