



# ***Surviving Night Shift:***

## ***Tips to Manage Healthy Sleep and Quality of Life***

Working while the rest of the world sleeps requires you make adjustments to your lifestyle in order to get adequate rest and remain alert during your waking hours, which can be difficult on its own. Then it seems as soon as you have transitioned to working nights, your schedule shifts back to days.

How do you make the transition without functioning like a zombie in the following days?

There are quite a few adjustments you can make to your routine to ease these transitions, but the keys are:

- Choosing a sleep schedule and mastering sleep hygiene
- Managing your exposure to sunlight and blue light
- Mastering the art of napping
- Managing caffeine intake
- Incorporating exercise to increase alertness
- Eating protein earlier in your waking cycle, and carbs later



***Our circadian rhythms are determined by our genetics. 15% of us are early birds, 10% are night owls, and 75% of us are between the two. Finding your sleep chronotype can help you determine how to best support your circadian cycle.***

## ***Choose a Sleep Schedule for Night Shift***

### ***A. Morning Sleep***

- Sleep immediately after getting home from your shift, **delaying** your drowsy phase.

***Begin staying up later a few days before your shift.***

- The day of your first night shift, take a 2-4 hour nap around 1PM, taking advantage of your body's natural dip in circadian rhythm.
- Tends to work better for night owls

### ***B. Evening Sleep***

- Sleep in the early evening hours prior to your shift, **advancing** your drowsy phase.

***Begin getting up earlier a few days before your shift.***

- The day of your first night shift, take a 3-hour nap in the evening prior to work.
- Tends to work better for early birds

***Our bodies and brains take cues from light and dark cycles of the day to adjust our circadian rhythm. The same cells sensitive to sunlight are also sensitive to blue light from screens.***

# ***Supporting Your Circadian Cycle***

## ***A. Morning Sleep***

- Before dawn, begin dimming lights in your work area and adjust your screen settings to limit blue light.
- Wear blue light filtering glasses when outside and on your drive home.
- Go to sleep as soon as you arrive home. Consider incorporating exercise into your routine after you wake up.

## ***B. Evening Sleep***

- Set screens to limit blue light display until just before dawn. After sunrise, set screens to allow more blue light.
- Get plenty of bright morning sunlight! Your drive home is a good opportunity for this. Consider exercising in the morning.
- Begin avoiding bright and blue light three hours before sleeping. Go to sleep in the early afternoon, around 1-3PM (whenever will allow you at least 7 hours of sleep).

# ***Adjusting for Days Off***

## ***A. Morning Sleep***

- Wear blue-blocking lenses on your drive and go to sleep when you get home, but get up earlier than usual. Expose yourself to **early afternoon sunlight** (before 3PM) to advance your sleep phase back to nighttime.
- Go to sleep that night and then wake with the morning light. Melatonin can help you fall asleep the first night (0.5 - 2mg, 2-3 hours before bed).
- Exercising the first morning you are not sleeping during the day can help adjust your circadian rhythm!

## ***B. Evening Sleep***

- Avoid bright and blue light for most of your last shift. Blue-blocking glasses can help.
- Try taking a 2-3 hour nap in the late morning or afternoon. Avoid caffeine in the 6 hours prior to your nap.
- Go to sleep that next day and wake up with the morning light.

***Expect some grogginess on the first day you wake up after your night shifts. Be gentle with yourself that day if you can. Don't overschedule!***

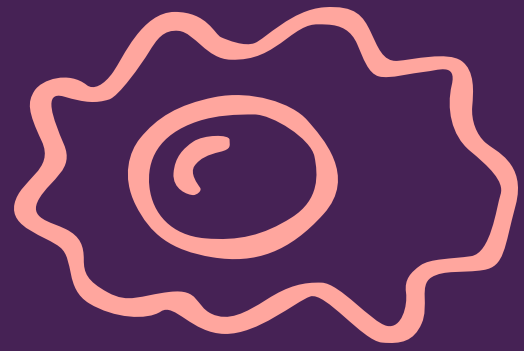
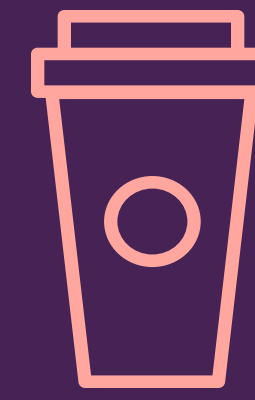


# ***Staying Alert for Morning Sleepers***



- Ensure proper, bright lighting early in your shift. This includes enabling blue light on your computer and phone screens. Light boxes can also be helpful!

- Caffeine can help early in your shift, but begin to avoid it six hours before the end of your shift.



- Choose protein-rich foods early in your shift and more carbs later. Snacking during your shift can help too.

- Go for a short walk or get up and stretch periodically to avoid becoming sleepy.

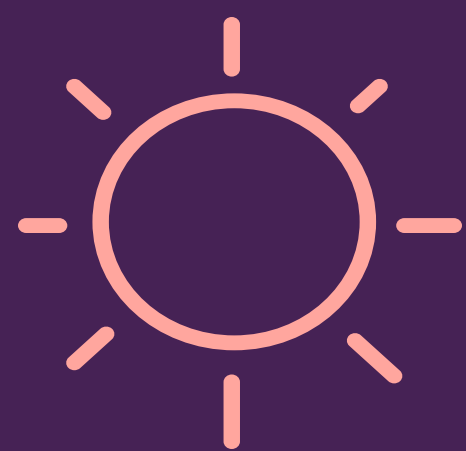


- A 10-30 minute nap halfway through your shift can increase alertness, but any longer can cause sleep inertia (it takes you a long time to feel alert again up waking).

- Listen to something interesting on your drive home to help keep you awake, like a podcast or audiobook you enjoy. Something interactive, like trivia, can also help keep you awake due to the need to answer the question!

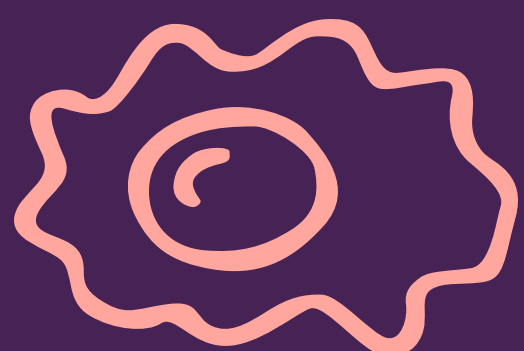


# ***Staying Alert for Evening Sleepers***



- Avoid blue light exposure in the evening and early night, but get lots of exposure to bright light (sunlight and blue light) in the morning. Exercise first thing in the morning can help with light exposure and advance your drowsy phase.

- Caffeine can help keep you alert several hours into your shift, from 1-2AM. Stop caffeine intake once you get home from work so you can sleep in the evening.



- Have a big breakfast shortly after waking up from your evening nap, lunch in the morning, and a small dinner before noon. Remember to have protein earlier in your waking cycle, and carbs later.

- Walk around or stretch during your shift to stay alert, about every 15-20 minutes. Exercise in the morning can help advance your drowsy phase.



- Although it will be easier for you to stay awake during your drive, it is still a good idea to listen to something interesting on your drive home to stay alert, like an audiobook, podcast, or trivia show.



# ***Sleep Hacks: Tips for Healthy Sleep***

## ***#1: Create an environment that supports healthy sleep.***

- Make the room as **dark and quiet** as you can. Blackout curtains can help. Use earplugs or a white noise machine if necessary.
- Make your bedding as comfortable as possible, and consider making your bed. Studies show that people who make their beds sleep better than those who do not.
- Cooler temperatures support better sleep. The optimum temperature is between 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit. But make sure your feet and hands are warm!
- Be sure you are using your bed for sleep or sexual activity **only**.



# ***Sleep Hacks: Moving from Wakefulness to Sleep***

## ***#2: Change your thoughts and behavior to increase sleep quality.***

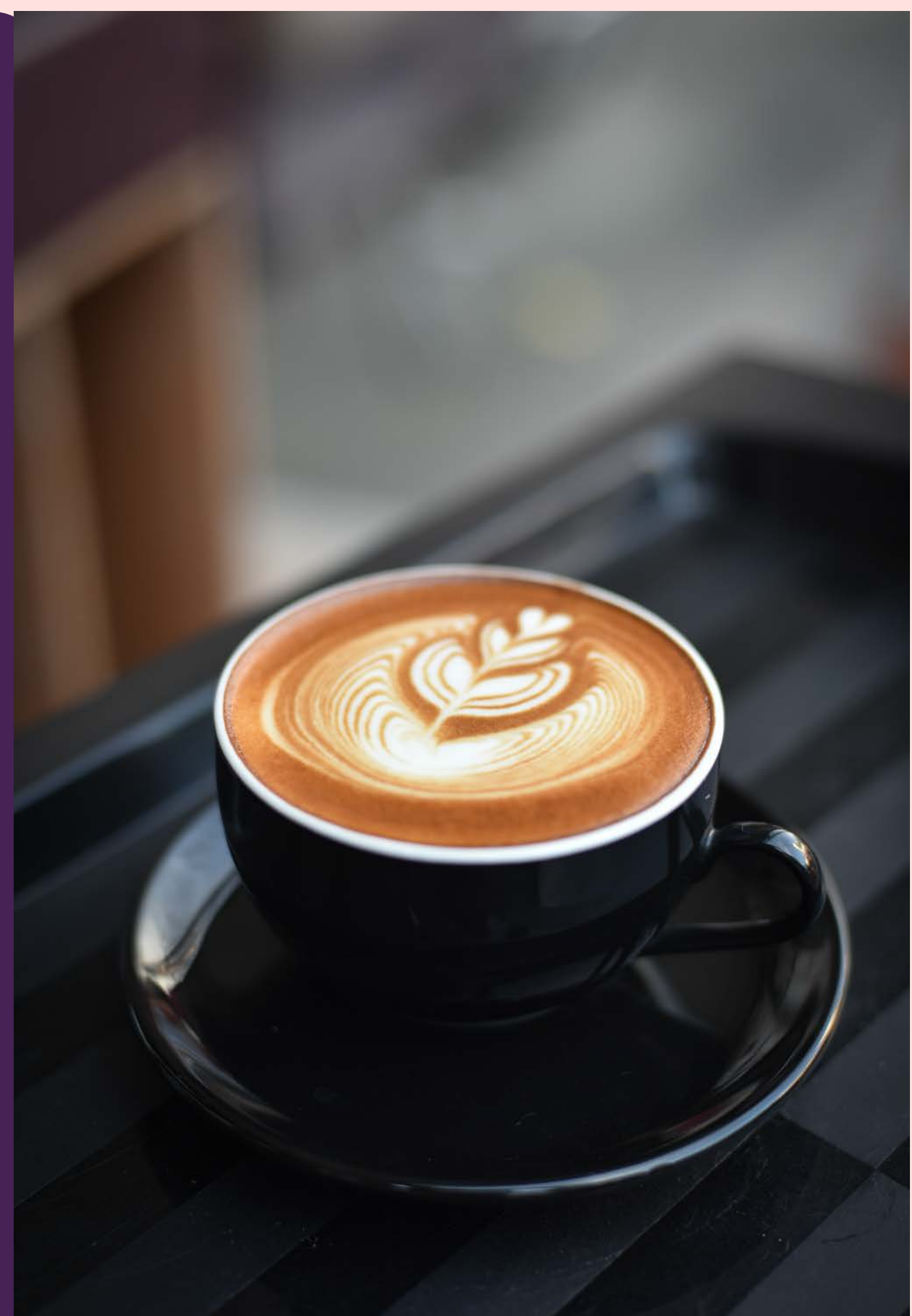
- If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do something-- *but stay in the dark!* Get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, or adjust the temperature. Resist the temptation to turn on a screen; remember that blue light can increase alertness.
- Positive thinking, prayer, meditation, and mindfulness exercises can help increase relaxation and decrease anxiety when you feel like you can't "turn off your brain."
- Avoid eating meals high in protein before bed, as protein tends to increase alertness.



# ***Sleep Hacks: Tips for Increasing Alertness***

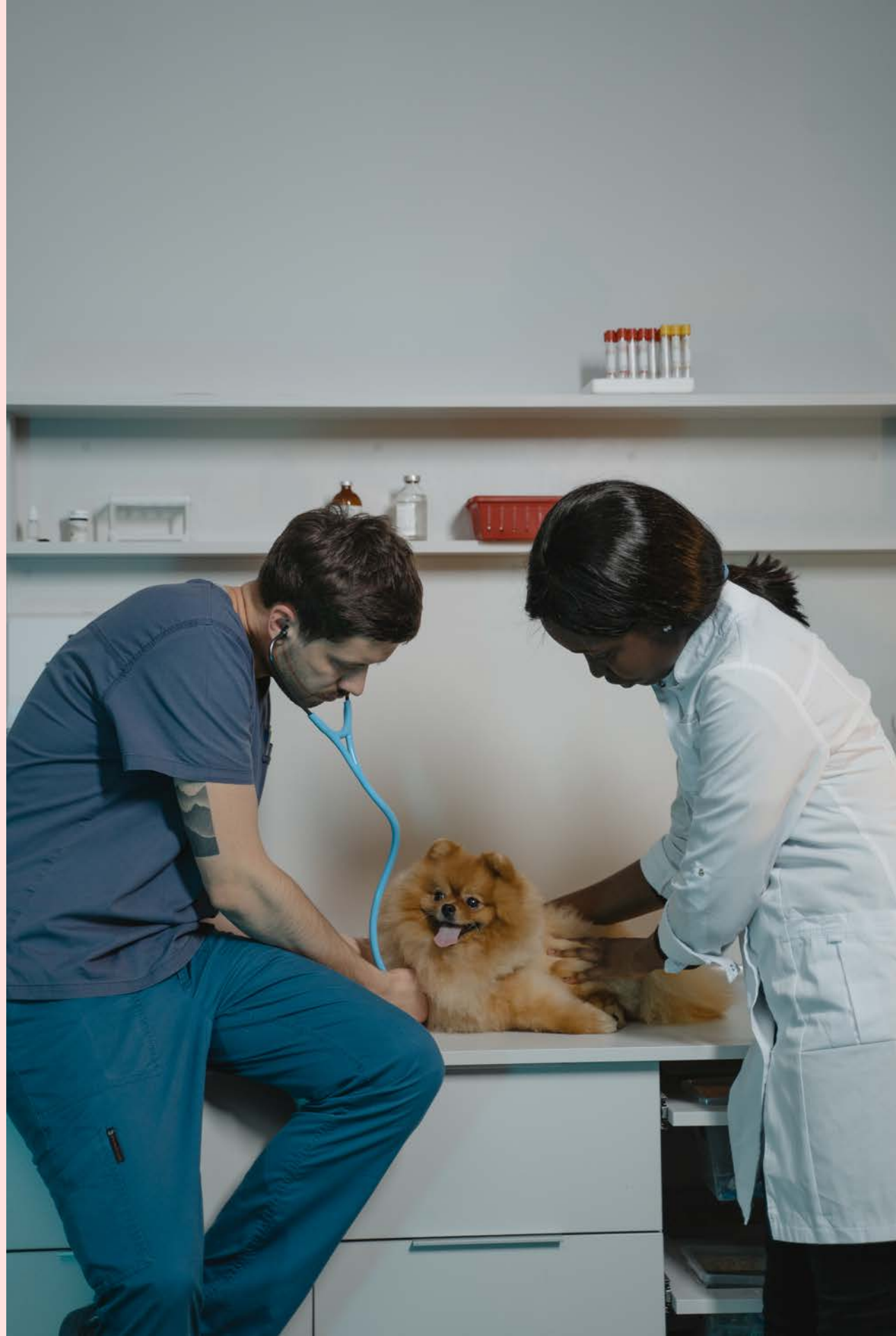
## ***#3: Try a napaccino!***

- Increase alertness quickly by having a napaccino! Drink a cup of coffee rather quickly (over 5 or 10 minutes) and then immediately lie down for a short nap, even if it is only for 15-20 minutes.
- Caffeine should be getting into your system right about the time you are waking up. The combined effects of the caffeine and the nap can help you stay alert.





# ***Navigating Rotating Shifts***



## ***What if I am working both day and night shifts?***

- Ensure you have a "crisis day" in your schedule after your night shift; you should not work a day shift when coming off a night shift.
- Rotate clockwise- If you can, do a series of day shifts, followed by evening shifts, and then night shifts. It is easier to adjust your circadian rhythm in this way.
- Rotate those shifts slowly, with at least two weeks between each shift. This gives your circadian cycle time to adjust.

# ***Sleep Medications***



## ***Do sleep medications support or harm your sleep cycle?***

- There is little scientific evidence to support the efficacy of herbal or vitamin/mineral supplements to support sleep (like valerian root, chamomile, magnesium, lavender, etc.).
- Some studies show that melatonin can help you get to sleep faster and sleep longer. A slow-release formula starting at 0.5mg (up to 2 mg) a couple hours before you plan to sleep will suffice.
- Studies show medications like Unisom and antihistamines can decrease your quality of sleep. Your body will adapt to the medication over as little as four days, requiring a larger dose every time.
- Prescription sleeping medications can lead to dependence and are associated with decreased sleep quality. They may also grogginess upon waking. Using alcohol to sleep can have similar effects.



***The key to healthy sleep is to focus on relaxation, not sedation.***



## ***Other Tips:***

- Schedule time with your loved ones on your days off.
- Prioritize your sleep! 18 hours without sleep is equivalent to a BAC of .05.
- If you are struggling with fatigue, add a 1-2 hour nap during the later afternoon (Morning Sleepers) or the morning (Evening Sleepers).

Sources:  
Frei, S. (2018). *Making Night Shift Work: A Practical Guide for the Night Worker*.  
Starkey, A. (2019). *Too Tired to Cook: The Shift Worker's Guide to Working (and Surviving) in a 24/7 World*. Balboa Press.