

Know Your Limits, Part 2

Shiftworkers have a special role in the workforce, especially those who work rotating shifts. Most Controllers in the pipeline industry work 12 hour rotating shifts. As mentioned in Part 1 of our article on knowing your limits, there are variations in the types of schedules worked, but generally, all Controllers share the lifestyle of working dayshift part of the month and nightshift the rest of the month. These rotating shifts present exceptional challenges for employees - physically, emotionally and socially.

Humans are born with an internal body clock known as the circadian rhythm. Sunlight is the primary cue for regulating this cyclical rhythm. Light signals alertness, while diminishing daylight signals hormones to be released that cause us to begin feeling drowsy and ready for sleep. The circadian rhythm regulates heart rate, hormone secretion, digestion, and highs and lows in the level of energy felt by an individual. It's unlikely that a human could successfully override this system to accommodate the demand of working rotating shifts.

What's a shiftworker to do? The first step is to understand the design of the circadian rhythm and learn effective ways to adjust. Secondly, it's imperative to prioritize sleep in a way that offsets the demands of the work schedule. Thirdly, when practical, live a reasonable distance from the Control Room so the commute doesn't cut into time that's designated for rest. And finally, limit your off-duty activities so they do not interfere with restful recovery. Getting the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep each day is key to managing the demands rotating shifts place on the body.

Controllers who post their work schedules on a calendar and block off the corresponding hours of sleep, experience the best outcomes for dealing with shiftwork. If the Controller's family is impacted by the schedule, it's a good idea to place the calendar in an area that's visible to everyone. Social activities and family time can then be planned for days off.

Some activities that occur during scheduled work days are absolutely necessary. It's important to make a plan for getting those things

accomplished as quickly as possible so that the hours set aside for sleep are not compromised. Even activities like scrolling social media or binge watching the latest series on Netflix can chip away at valuable sleep time. Sleep is the one and only cure for fatigue.

Last month, we looked at the company's responsibilities for ensuring that Controllers be allowed the necessary time to rest and arrive to their shift "fit for duty". The responsibility for staying alert on the job is a shared one. Each Controller is tasked with the responsibility of limiting off-duty activities and prioritizing sleep. An adequate quantity and quality of sleep are the only means of avoiding long-term health issues that can result from the constant challenges placed on the body by working days and nights on a rotating basis.

Plan well. Use your Pipeline Performance Group calendar to post work, sleep and off-duty activities in order to manage the extraordinary challenges associated with rotating shiftwork. A Controller's schedule can present difficulties for not only the Controller, but also for their loved ones. Keeping a calendar posted where you and others can see it, may help to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding.

