

Turn that Frown Upside Down

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand why managing fatigue is challenging for shift workers. The stretches of 12 hour day shifts, most often alternating with stretches of 12 hour night shifts, compounded with family responsibilities can wear a person out! No matter the specific schedule, working 12 hour days and nights disrupts your natural circadian rhythm and can take a toll on your body. Managing your health, your mood AND your fatigue starts with good quality and quantity of sleep, along with managing your stress, exercise, and good nutrition. But what things can you do to help manage your fatigue while on shift?

In our research with over 1,800 Controllers across the U.S. and Canada, the number one reported Controller fatigue mitigation technique is to talk to the other Controller(s) on shift. Whether discussing work, or weekend plans, a little conversation can help lift spirits, build comradery, and make the time feel like it is passing by a little quicker.

Getting some exercise or doing some alertness exercises can also be helpful when trying to mitigate mid-shift fatigue. If there are multiple Controllers on duty, perhaps a quick walk outside and some fresh air can help restore your energy. Standing up at the console, walking a few laps around the control room, stretching and taking deep breaths, or even hopping on an elliptical or treadmill for a few minutes can help get the blood flowing, revitalizing your body and your brain for the remainder of the shift. Exercise is also shown to improve your mood and your emotional processing ability, while also reducing anxiety and depression. Let your motion drive your emotion!

Another common set of fatigue mitigation tactics for shift workers include grabbing a drink (with or without caffeine) and/or a light snack. Use caffeine sparingly, particularly when close to the end of the shift. If you are traveling home to sleep soon, too much caffeine too close to sleep time can interfere with the rest you need between shifts. Light snacks may be a better choice over heavy meals since heavy meals can exacerbate your sleepiness, while the active digestion process can also lead to restless sleep.

The features of your control room may also work to your benefit when fighting fatigue. If you are fortunate enough to have a sit-to-stand desk, adjusting the desk height so that you are sitting up straighter or standing can help you stretch out while still maintaining focus on your SCADA screens. Adjusting light levels in the control room either by adjusting overhead lighting, task lighting or window shades can also help fight against the circadian dips during your shift. Also, if you have a heating and air conditioning control panel in the control room, setting a cooler temperature or turning on a fan may help to increase your alertness levels.

Other fatigue mitigation techniques that may help you maintain alertness during the shift are taking a nap or relaxing in a fatigue room for a brief period (if other Controller coverage is available), reading, browsing the internet, watching television, listening to the radio or talking to family or friends on the phone.

Be your own driver of change. Take an active role in mitigating fatigue!

