Scheduling for the Season

The holiday season is upon us! That magical time of year filled with holiday tunes on repeat, an abundance of breakroom treats, long-awaited celebrations, and a calendar packed tighter than an overstuffed Thanksgiving turkey. For shift workers, navigating the holidays can be challenging. Balancing night shifts, rotating hours, and early morning commutes with festive dinners, holiday shopping, and family traditions is enough to make anyone want to hibernate until January. If you're not careful, trying to be everywhere at once can leave you exhausted, propped up by sheer willpower and questionable amounts of eggnog. But with a little strategic planning, you can enjoy meaningful holiday moments while maintaining your sleep schedule and your sanity.

When the holiday hustle begins, sleep is often the first item sacrificed. You tell yourself, "I'll just sleep for a few hours so I can attend Pop's annual 8:00 am pancake breakfast." However, fast forward to 1:00 pm, and you are nodding off directly into your holiday punch while Auntie June explains her cat's latest health issues.

Guard your rest and recovery periods fiercely! Clearly communicate your sleep schedule to family and friends so they know when you are available and when knocking on your bedroom door might result in extreme grumpiness. If you are scheduled to work night shift on a day there is a family gathering, schedule a strategic power nap right before the event. Protecting your sleep ensures that when you show up, you are rested and ready to enjoy the fun, while also being alert and effective for your upcoming shift.

Shift workers understand better than anyone that time is a precious commodity. You don't have to accept every invitation that comes your way. Trying to attend three different holiday parties in one weekend while working 12-hour shifts is a fast track to burnout! Instead, focus on meaningful connections. Prioritize gatherings with the people who matter most. If your shift schedule prevents you from making it to the family's holiday dinner, create new traditions. Celebrate "Thanksgiving-on-a-Tuesday" or host an afternoon dessert and game gathering during a stretch of days off. True friends and loved ones will appreciate quality time with you far more than a rushed and exhausted 20-minute appearance during the Thanksgiving meal.

Amidst shopping for gifts, prepping festive dishes, and working demanding shifts, don't forget the most important item on your holiday checklist - YOURSELF. Self-care during the holiday season doesn't have to be a big to-do. Take 15 minutes to sit quietly with a hot cup of tea, read a chapter of a book, or go for a brisk walk with the dog in the crisp autumn air. Pay attention to your body's cues. If you are feeling overwhelmed, it is perfectly okay to politely decline an event and choose a quiet evening at home instead.

By proactively scheduling both your sleep and your social calendar, you can keep fatigue from taking over your holidays. This holiday season, get adequate rest, raise a glass with your loved ones, reflect on your blessings, and enjoy the feast!

