

## **SLEEP WELL:**

Actor **Rishika Mihani** reveals her bedtime secrets to **Amber Dias**. “Lack of sleep shows on one’s face, so it is very important to make sure you get a good night’s sleep. For me, a good night’s sleep is one that leaves me fresh and energetic the next morning. If I have to go to work the next day, I try to ensure that I have a good seven – eight hours of sleep. But if I have the day off, I stay up to watch TV till 2 AM and then roll out of bed at 10 AM the next day. “Before going to bed, washing my feet and moisturizing my body is a must. I prefer sleeping on a hard mattress as it supports my back, and I always sleep on my left side. I am very particular about maintaining my mattress. I keep it immaculate and change my sheets every five days. If I have a backache, I place cushion or pillow under my calves.

“I find that eating a light dinner and having a hot bath before going to bed helps me sleep better. I would also suggest turning off or putting your mobile phone on silent mode, So that you can enjoy an undisturbed sleep.”

## **ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH?**

*We are talking about sleep. If you are among the millions toiling in the graveyard shift, it’s quite likely you’re chronically sleep deprived which in turn is doing grave harm to your overall health. Here are some strategies to limit the damage.*

Here’s a frightening incident that occurred last March at Reagan National Airport but which you can just as easily envision in any busy, overloaded airport, like Mumbai or Delhi. A veteran air traffic controller fell asleep while working alone on an overnight shift during which time pilots of inbound planes were unable to reach the airport tower for a full 15 minutes. Repeated phone calls from the regional facility to the tower also went unanswered.

The controller, who began working for the Federal Aviation Administration in 1990 and became a supervisor in 2005, recalled thinking. “ I need to throw some water on my face” as he noted the inbound approach of three planes. He says he knew that he was “dragging” and “slipping, struggling” just before nodding off, according to a report by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). He did not recall anything after that until waking up later.

“When his awareness returned, he thought he had only been out for a couple of minutes,” said NTSB’s report. “ He heard [the American Airlines pilot] calling in a “forceful voice,” and shortly afterward the pilot of [the United Airlines flight] was asking for the tower’s phone number. That was when he realized he had missed quite a bit. The supervisor said that he knew he wasn’t coherent, and now believes that he had been asleep.”

The controller also told the NTSB that the midnight shift schedule for supervisors at the traffic control tower was “insane.” At the time, supervisors were required to work a week of midnight shifts once a month.

The controller described waking up that night as coming “out of the haze” and as if there were a 50-pound weight on his head and shoulders. He also found it a struggle to talk, with the foginess lasting for three or four minutes.

The NTSB report said that the controller went to his doctor the following day to determine whether or not a mini-stroke or seizure could have triggered the episode. The doctor was unable to identify any major medical event, but did say that the controller’s irregular sleep schedule in the five days before the incident likely played a role.

## ON SHIFTING SANDS

“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in a doctor’s book” goes an Irish proverb. But for a generation that believes in the ‘work hard, party harder’ motto, this old saw may appear passé. Cities today take pride in the fact they ‘never sleep’. Yet those who work the night shift daily know what it is to be chronically sleep deprived. Ask 42-year-old rickshaw driver Janaradhan Gali. Till two years back Gali worked through the nights (when the fares are typically higher), slept for a few hours during this till his systolic blood pressure shot up to a whopping 240 mmhg.

Imagine what it’s like to come home at dawn and climb into bed with the sun’s rays fighting their way in around the curtains. Add to that increased traffic noise and the general invasions – the garbage man, the milkman, friends dropping by – and worker gets 5 to 7 hours less sleep per week than a day worker.

If you’ve never worked the night shift, you might think that adjusting to it would be simple enough, something that might take a few days to get used to. Nothing could be further from the truth. Human beings are built to be daytime creatures. It’s hardwired into our circuitry.

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Even those who choose night work don’t fully appreciate what they’re up against, namely a powerful inner timing mechanism that regulates sleep and wakefulness and governs a daily ebb and flow of body chemicals. The body’s internal clock is reset each day by the rising sun and evening darkness, creating a natural cycle called a circadian rhythm. When you deliberately try to shift the sleep/each one beating out a different time. Your delicate internal rhythms go haywire.

Bhakti Khilnani was only 17 when she first entered the premises of a call centre, lured by the promise of a fat salary and financial independence. Little did she realize back then that opting for the more lucrative night shift would cause an upheaval in her life style. “Right from my young days I had this habit of sleeping late, even when I wasn’t studying. So a night shift seemed tailor-made for me. It also paid more, made travelling from my home (in Ambarnath) to the call centre in Vile Parle and back – a 2-hour ride each way – less of a hassle.”

But Bhakti hadn’t taken into account the natural rhythms of her body. “The first few days of the night shift were horrible. My head would literally crash on the desk post 1 AM and my eyes would shut shop without volition. I thought at this rate I wouldn’t survive in the job beyond the month. I even wondered if I had taken the right decision by opting for a night shift.” Bhakti resorted to endless cups of tea and coffee followed by frequent sessions of splashing cold water on her eyes to shake the sleep out of her system.

When she finally managed to retrain her body clock, her lifestyle went for a toss. “I was in bed from 7 AM to 4 PM, left for work at 7 PM, when everybody else was ending their work day.” So the poor girl barely had time for family and friends. She also gained weight “on junk food that was eaten at some really odd hours like two in the morning,” kept falling prey to minor maladies (cold, flu). Now Bhakti’s body clock has set in such a way that “I sleep through the day even on holidays, which my family finds very odd, and toss and turn in bed during the night.”

Lack of sleep is the biggest complaint among shift workers. But the larger problem is the toll that not enough sleep over long periods can take on the body. Consider the potential health hazards shift workers court:

**1. Chronic fatigue** Shift workers often do not get enough restful sleep. Studies show that when test subjects who had stayed up all night tried to sleep in quiet, dark laboratories by day, they still tended to rise in just 4 to 5 hours.

**2. Depression and loneliness** Working nights or evenings can be socially devastating to some. Feeling out of kilter is com-

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Pounded if you have children. After all, PTA meetings, soccer games, and mealtimes are all planned around the schedules of day people. Most of the time you'll only see your kids as sleeping lumps under the covers.

**3. Susceptibility to colds and flu** Night-shift workers tend to have weaker immune systems than their day-working counterparts, which may make them more prone to colds and flu.

**4. Stomach problems** Research indicates that many shift workers are plagued by gastrointestinal problems, such as indigestion, nausea, diarrhea, constipation, food craving, and loss of appetite.

**5. Erratic menstrual cycles** Some studies suggest that shift work may make it more difficult for a woman to conceive. Additionally, once pregnant, risk of miscarriage is higher, as are the chances of premature birth and lower-birth-weight babies.

**6. Obesity** In a survey of 469 nurses, weight gain was higher among those working the night shift. In another study from France that monitored night-shift nurses over 10 years, researchers found that many put on extra pounds in the last five years of the study. And more than twice as many night-shift nurses gained 15 pounds or more than the day shifters did. Why? If indeed working night shifts does expand your waistline, one theory says that night shifters tend to snack more and exercise less. Another says that an erratic sleep schedule lowers the rate at which the body uses calories.

**7. Heart disease** The long-term effect of night-shift work may be even more significant. Studies indicate that night workers tend to have higher blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels, precursors to heart disease. One landmark study found that working night workers at a 580% higher risk of coronary heart disease.

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### **FOOD FOR SLEEP**

**Dairy products** like milk and yoghurt contain tryptophan. This amino acid triggers the production of sleep serotonin and melatonin a sleep aid noted for its ability to help regulate the body's internal clock. Some research has also suggests that a deficiency of calcium in the diet can cause disturbed sleep patterns and a lack of deep (REM) sleep. Dairy thus does double duty.

**Oats** is a good natural source of tryptophan. For a warm, soothing snack before bed, try eating a small bowl of porridge to help you drift off peacefully.

**Bananas** are excellent source of magnesium and potassium, minerals that prevent muscle spasms or cramps during the night, making them a good bedtime snack as well, particularly after a heavy exercise session. Researchers from the University of New England in New South Wales have also found that having a banana before turning in for the night can help suffers of sleep apnea by keeping their throats open and therefore reducing the risk of choking.

**Cherries** are a decent natural source of melatonin as well as being excellent for overall health. Research in the *Journal of Sleep and Sleep Disorders* indicates that consuming tart cherries before bed helped participants sleep faster and easier, making fresh cherries or cherry juice a great natural sleep aid.

**Flax seeds** are ideal for increasing levels of sleep-regulating serotonin in the body due to their high levels of both tryptophan and omega-3 fatty acids have been proven to help reduce the anxiety, depression and stress which are leading causes of insomnia, and have been shown to be effective against the condition sleep apnea.

**8. Accidents** Since alertness naturally plummets in the wee hours of the morning at the end of a shift, there's greater risk of an accident while using heavy machinery or of falling asleep at the wheel on the drive home.

Bhakti is now planning to give up night shifts and opt for day shifts ``even though I know it will be a very tough task to change my body clock all over again. However I've come to realize that money isn't everything, I am anxious to get back to studying and earn a degree, which will get me a choice of jobs that have more normal hours.”

Gali suffered a stroke that left side paralysed. ``I was bed ridden for almost a year. The doctors in my native place in Andhra Pradesh, who treated me, blamed my erratic lifestyle combined with very few hours of sleep for my health problem. It was only with the help of medication and regular physiotherapy that I'm back on the roads. Now, I don't miss my 8 hours of sleep and avoid driving all night long. I still need to put in late nights, however, to keep the kitchen fuel burning,” he regrets.

So, are you doomed, health wise, if your job puts you in a graveyard shift? Not quite, if you follow our advise.

## **BEFORE WORK**

**Take sleep seriously.** This may seem obvious, but many night-shift workers stagger home, turn on the TV, and fall asleep on the couch. It's no wonder they feel terrible when they wake up. You need to treat sleep as a precious and fragile thing. This requires some extra planning, yes, and extra hassle that a night sleeper doesn't have to deal with:

- Prepare a quiet room. Put dark, heavy drapes on the windows to block out sunlight. You may even want to place a strip of black tape over your alarm clock's LCD, if you find it's too bright.
- Put out the "do not disturb" sign. Social custom makes it wrong to visit at three in the morning. But few people would think twice about visiting a night-shift worker at three in the afternoon. Inform friends of the hours you keep and ask them not to disturb you. Put a sign on your door that says, "Quiet, shift worker sleeping."
- Ask someone turn on the A/C or fan *before* you reach home after work. That way, the bedroom will be cooler when you get home, which many people find more conducive to sleeping.

**Take a nap.** Can't sleep more than 4 or 5 hours in the morning following your night shift? Schedule a nap for the afternoon, when a natural lull occurs. If you've managed 5 to 6 hours in the morning, your afternoon nap should be 15 to 45 minutes long. If you were only able to get 3 hours of sleep in the morning, go ahead and nap for about 2 hours in the afternoon. In general, however, napping longer than an hour may leave you groggy.

**Exercise in the afternoon.** Ideally most people should be exercising in the morning, before other activities begin to encroach on their time. But that can be confusing, if not simply bad, advice for night shifters. Exercising when you get home from a nighttime job only makes it more difficult for you to fall asleep. Instead, schedule your exercise for when you wake. There's also evidence that regular aerobic exercise during your night shift may help you adapt to night-shift work better by shifting your circadian rhythms to match your sleep/wake schedule. Five-times-a-week exercise (at least) is recommended for preventing heart disease and overstuffed waistlines, too.

## AT WORK

**Enlighten your load.** Exposure to bright light at night can help shift the body's clock to "active" mode. In studies, workers who sat under bright lights for 6 or more hours per night shift were more alert and had better daytime sleep.

**Don't drink coffee after midnight.** That goes for tea and cola, too. Caffeine stays in the body for 6 hours. It can interfere with sleep and also cause indigestion. Your best option if you are a night shifter: Have no later than midnight. (if you're a heavy coffee drinker now, phase down slowly, Cutting back too rapidly could produce caffeine-withdrawal symptoms. And it's hard to sleep when you're nauseated and have a headache.)

**Avoid 3 AM snack attacks** Try eating your biggest meal of the day during your night shift's lunch. This reduces the temptation to snack during the wee hours of the night.

And you should snack only strategically. Night-shift workers often face long hours of boredom. One way to pass the time

### THE BEAUTY OF SLEEP

- Sleep is just as critical for maintaining wellness as a healthy diet or proper exercise.
- Sleep is when the immune system recharges itself, skin and organ cells repair themselves and grow, our bodies recharge and recoup.
- If you get less than your required 7 to 9 hours, you risk causing damage to your mood, cognition, performance and efficiency as well as depriving your skin of natural beauty skincare.
- A person's communication skills tend to improve with better sleep and will more likely be able avoid an accident of any kind by being extra alert.

## **NIGHT SHIFT vs. ROTATING SHIFT**

Permanent night shifters and workers who rotate between the first, second, and third shifts have a lot in common: They are constantly changing their sleep/wake cycles. Rotators do it because their jobs demand it. But even so-called stable night-shift workers disrupt their sleep cycles by shifting to a daytime schedule on weekends so they can be with their families. That's why you need to make your schedule as regular as possible:

- Go to bed at the same time every day. Let's say you've worked Friday night till dawn on Saturday, but want to get to your son's tennis game at noon. Don't skip your sleep time. Instead, get into bed at your normal hour and set your alarm for 11 AM. After the game, catch a long nap so you can stay up as late as possible and remain on your "night" schedule.
- If you're a rotating shift worker, your body will probably never adjust to each change in your sleep/wake cycle without the proper schedule of bright light during several consecutive night shifts and regular dark, long daytime sleep opportunities. If you have a choice, opt for rapid rotation, which usually consists of two day shifts followed by two evening shifts, followed by two night shifts and three or four days off. Why this is best: On all but your two night shifts, you can sleep at night so you won't be fighting a constant battle with your body clock. You get to retain your diurnal (daytime) orientation. And you can sleep off those two long nights. ♦
- Rotate forward, not back. If you're on a rotating schedule and you have the choice, select a schedule that requires you to stay up increasingly longer – for example, from nights to mornings to evenings rather than evenings to mornings to nights. It's easier to extend days than to shrink them.

Is to eat. Unfortunately, the snack cart or vending machines rarely offer healthful choices.

Make a point of bringing cut-up vegetables, fruit, low-fat yoghurt, or air-popped popcorn to work with you

**Break a sweat.** Instead of reaching for a cup of coffee during your break, walk a few flights of stairs, or stroll around your workplace. The benefits are twofold: You are burning calories instead of consuming them and, one study showed, workers who are allowed to take 20-minute exercise breaks report improved alertness even at 4 AM., when the body normally begins feeling sleepy.

## **ON YOUR WAY HOME**

**Wear sunglasses to shade your eyes from the morning sun.** They will keep sunlight from cueing the body that it is morning and all you to go to sleep.

**Avoid 6 AM. ``diners``** Eating a big meal at the end of your day signals your body ``it's morning.`` And you'll have trouble getting to sleep. Also, eating heavy meals before you hit the sack may cause indigestion, not to mention weight gain over time.

## **AT HOME**

**Go to bed right away.** Avoid the temptation to do chores, pay bills, or watch TV. Instead, wind down with a book, then go to bed quickly. Specialists say this is less disruptive to your body clock than staying up in the morning and sleeping in the afternoon.

### **Probably the worst thing you can do is drink yourself to sleep**

Wear earplugs to dampen the daytime noises. Turn off the telephone and disconnect the doorbell. Some people find that it helps to buy a ``white noise`` machine, which emits a low steady tone that masks other sounds. Others use recordings of the sounds of waterfalls or ocean waves to soothe them into slumber.

**Avoid using sleep inducers.** Probably the worst thing you can do is drink yourself to sleep. Alcohol interferes with REM sleep, which is key to getting good rest. And though a drink may help you fall asleep faster, it also wakes you up.

## **MORE PERMANENT SOLUTIONS**

Even if you follow the above advice, you may still find that working the night shift is not getting any easier, especially when you hit in the mid-40s to early 50s.

Scientists don't understand exactly why aging makes us less adaptable to night-shift work, but in one study, the sleep disruption was twice as bad in middle-age workers as in young workers.

The disruptive patterns of the night shift put the body in a constant state of stress, which doctors believe causes the release of stress hormones that raise blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Perhaps the best remedy for those whose bodies have trouble coping is to find work on the day shift. It makes for a much healthier lifestyle in the long run.

Finally, go easy on yourself if you're having trouble adjusting to the night shift. The problem lies in your brain. It's not a personal failing.