

# media fact sheet

## SHIFT WORK DISORDER

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**What is shift work disorder (SWD)?**

Shift work disorder (SWD) is a medical condition that can be diagnosed and treated by a doctor. Shift work disorder occurs when the body's internal sleep-wake clock is out of sync with the individual's work schedule—their body is telling them to go to sleep when their work schedule needs them to stay awake. Because of this disruption of the body's natural rhythm, people with shift work disorder often struggle to stay awake during their waking hours (excessive sleepiness), or have trouble sleeping during their sleeping hours (insomnia).

**Who does shift work disorder affect?**

Approximately 15 million Americans perform some type of nonstandard shift work—evening, night, irregular, rotating, or split shift. Studies have also shown that up to 45 percent of shift workers report symptoms of excessive sleepiness and/or insomnia, and approximately 10–25 percent of shift workers are estimated to have shift work disorder.

**What types of professions require shift work?**

A wide range of occupations require either permanent or occasional shift work	
<b>Professional and business services</b> such as accountants, stockbrokers, customer service reps, IT support staff and other people with corporate jobs	<b>Healthcare professionals</b> such as emergency room physicians, nurses and overnight pharmacists
<b>Leisure, entertainment, and hospitality</b> such as bartenders, servers, chefs, casino dealers, performers, radio DJs, concierges and doormen	<b>Wholesale and retail trade</b> such as warehouse workers, department store and other retail-store workers
<b>Production and manufacturing</b> such as steel, textile and other factory workers	<b>Protective services</b> such as firefighters, dispatchers and security guards

**What are the symptoms of shift work disorder?**

Symptoms of shift work disorder include insomnia during sleeping hours and excessive sleepiness during waking hours. Excessive sleepiness is defined as having trouble staying awake enough to do the things you usually do. Insomnia is trouble sleeping.

**What are the potential consequences of shift work disorder?**

Shift work disorder can potentially lead to other issues:

- Trouble focusing
- Sleepiness-related accidents
- Reduced work performance
- Missed family and social activities
- Increased irritability
- Worsening of heart and stomach disorders

**How is shift work disorder diagnosed?**

Shift work disorder is diagnosed by a doctor and does not require specialized testing. Your doctor may consider the criteria below to determine if you have shift work disorder:

- A persistent or recurrent pattern of sleep disruption leading to excessive sleepiness or insomnia that is due to a mismatch between the sleep-wake schedule required by a person's environment and his or her circadian sleep-wake pattern
- The sleep disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment of social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
- The disturbance does not occur exclusively during the course of another sleep disorder or other mental disorder
- The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition
- Presence of insomnia during the major sleep period or excessive sleepiness during the major awake period associated with night shift work or frequently changing shift work



How is shift work disorder treated?

Only a change in shift work can resolve shift work disorder, but there are some things one can do to try to cope with shift work disorder symptoms:

- Planned napping before or during the night shift to improve alertness and performance
- Timed light exposure in the work environment to decrease sleepiness during night shift work
- Administration of melatonin prior to daytime sleep to promote daytime sleepiness
- Hypnotic medications may be used to promote daytime sleep
- Wake promoting agents to improve wakefulness during the night shift

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