# A screen shot of a computer Description automatically generatedSurviving the hazards of shift work hours in healthcare

Healthcare is a 24-hour, seven days a week industry. As a result, healthcare workers are required to provide services around the clock through shift work schedules. Shift work schedules increase health and safety risks by reducing sleep time, family and non-work related responsibilities. Additionally, the long working hours increase exposures to workplace hazards while reducing recovery time. These immediate effects promote stress, fatigue, negative mood, decreased awareness, discomfort, physiologic dysfunction and poor health behaviors (overeating, smoking and lack of exercise). In turn, these could lead to workplace illnesses and injuries.

*Fatigue – the main issues with shift work activities:*

During the daytime, our internal clock wants us to be awake, alert and productive. Adjusting to different schedules can be more stressful than what the human body wants. The condition of fatigue occurs, and it results in reduced alertness.

*Tips for dealing with fatigue:*

* Engineering controls can help, such as improved lighting, ventilation, proper temperatures and noise control.
* The primary key to handling fatigue lies with each employee. Applying the information can provide an improvement in your health and well-being when working shifts and long hours.
* Make sleep a priority. Your body cannot adjust if you do not give it a chance.
* Keep your bedroom dark and quiet; have family or roommates cooperate with noise control.
* During pre-sleep hours it is advisable to avoid the use of caffeine products as well as alcohol and tobacco.
* Meals should be regularly scheduled and avoid heavy meals near bedtime.
* Maintain a regular exercise routine to improve sleep as well as overall stress.
* Most important of all, get enough sleep that will accommodate your personal body needs.

*Tips for encouraging alertness during night shifts:*

* Schedule short breaks throughout your shift.
* Exercise when feeling fatigued; stretch or take a short walk.
* Eat nutritious meals and snacks; avoid junk food.
* Develop practices on how to monitor fatigue levels among team members.
* Develop a buddy system when completing tasks during likely periods of fatigue.

Never rely on medications or caffeine to enhance alertness. 