Sleep and shift work

How to sleep better when you work nights or changing shifts.

Your body clock expects you to be awake in daylight and asleep in the dark. Shift work asks it to do the opposite, so sleep after a night shift is usually shorter and lighter. You cannot remove that completely. You can make it a good deal easier.

When	What tends to help
Before the first night	Sleep in that morning if you can. Take a nap in the afternoon or early evening, up to about 90 minutes.
Early in the shift	Bright light. Caffeine, if you use it. Eat your main meal before you start.
Later in the shift	Stop caffeine about six hours before you plan to sleep. Light snacks, not a heavy meal. A short nap on your break, if your workplace allows it.
Going home	If you are sleepy, do not drive. Get a lift, take public transport, or nap first. Sunglasses help on a bright morning.
Sleeping in the day	Go to bed as soon as you can. Dark, cool and quiet: blackout blinds or an eye mask, earplugs, phone on silent. Tell the people you live with when you will be asleep.
After the last night	Take a short sleep in the morning, an hour or two. Then get up, get outside, and go to bed at a normal time that night.

Things that help whatever the shift

- **A routine for each shift pattern.** The same wind-down before sleep, whatever time sleep is.
- **Protect your sleep.** Treat it like an appointment. Deliveries and phone calls can wait.
- **Go easy on alcohol.** It may knock you out, but it breaks up the sleep that follows.
- **Keep moving and keep seeing people.** Shift work squeezes out exercise and company first. Plan them in on your days off.
- **Bed is still for sleep.** If you are wide awake after 20 minutes or so, get up, do something quiet in low light, and go back when you are sleepy.

> **When to get help**
> Talk to your GP or occupational health if you often nod off at work or at the wheel, if your sleep stays poor on days off, or if your mood is dropping. Some people's bodies never adjust to nights, and that is not a failing.

What gets in the way of my sleep around shifts

The two changes I will try first

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