

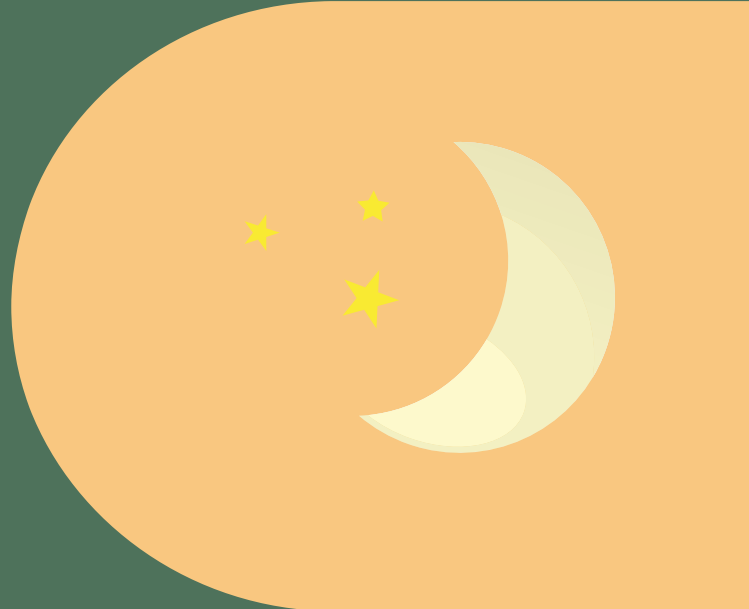
NIGHT WORK AND SHIFT WORK

What is the issue

Night work has been associated with longer term health outcomes including breast, colon, prostate and bowel cancers; cardiovascular disease and obesity.

More immediately the impact of disrupted sleep on attention, memory and irritability have been linked with accidents.

While we need to have 24 hour coverage in some industries we also need to think about how to support our workforce



How is harm caused?

It is thought that longer term harm is caused by the reduced production of the hormone melatonin which helps us go to sleep. Melatonin levels reduce when people are exposed to light. Other potential impacts are genetic changes and reduced vitamin D exposure. Shift work disrupts sleep resulting in tiredness and increased risks of making a mistake. All of these may have an impact but cancer risk is increased by obesity.

What can employers do?

Designing shifts that are forward rotating (day, evening then night) with a minimum of 11 hours between shifts.

Making sure no more than 3 nights are worked consecutively.

Having shift start times that do not require getting up in the middle of the night.

Ensuring people are fit to drive on the way home.

Educating the workforce on the impact of night work on health and fatigue.

Find ways to support health promotion activities in relation to food and physical activity.



Other recommendations

While research has tried to find other ways of reducing the impact of night and shift work including pharmacological studies: many of these have not been successful.

Other guidance includes

- Reducing exposure to daylight on the journey home - when it is safe to do so.
- Napping as a means of recovering from sleep debt

Further research is needed

For further information the full article is available here

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