

Nightmares and Night Terrors

Nightmares and night terrors are very frightening dreams that may cause major distress in a shift worker's life, thereby becoming a sleep disorder. Sleepwalking is sometimes a by-product of the nightmare or night terror that must be addressed if it develops into a sleep disorder as well.

Nightmares occur only during REM (dreaming) sleep and can be at anytime during your sleep. With nightmares you can almost always remember your dreams.

Causes of Nightmares:

- Surviving or witnessing a traumatic event
- Stressful situations, "SHIFT WORK"
- Major changes in ones' life
- Certain medical conditions
- Substance abuse
- High fever
- Alcohol and drugs

Symptoms of Nightmares:

- Racing heart
- Rapid breathing
- Sweating

Diagnosis:

Not all shift workers who have ever had a nightmare suffer from this form of sleep disorder. For it to be classified as a sleep disorder, the nightmare must be recurrent and causing major distress in the person's work and personal life.

Night Terrors

Night terrors take place in the first three hours of sleep, during your non-dreaming state of sleep. They usually begin at about the same time every night, with generally only one terror occurring during the shift worker's sleep, although some have been known to experience multiple night terrors during sleep.

With night terrors it is very difficult to awaken and you will remember very little or nothing of the night terror.

Causes of Night Terrors:

- Due to the life of a shift worker, "fatigue" plays a role in promoting the frequency of this sleep disorder.
- "Sleep deprivation" another reality in a shift worker's life, factors into the multiple occurrences of night terrors.

Symptoms of Night Terrors:

- Sitting up abruptly in bed and screaming or crying
- Pupils are dilated
- Face is flushed
- Perspiration
- Racing heart beat
- Racing pulse

If you have one or more of these symptoms, see your health care provider as soon as possible to discuss the best course of treatment.

Sleepwalking

Sleepwalking can manifest itself in conjunction with other sleep disorders or it can occur alone. Sleepwalking is a series of complex behaviours that begin during slow-wave sleep and cause a sleeping person to get out of bed and walk around. For sleepwalking to be considered a sleep disorder a shift worker can sleepwalk as little as once a month or in extreme cases, every night and sometimes can lead to injury.



Symptoms of Sleepwalking:

- Waking in a different bed, but do not recall getting up and moving
- Finding partially eaten food around the house with no idea how it got there
- Discovering certain items knocked over or strewn about the house and do not remember how it got that way
- Finding that you have injured yourself (bump on you head) with no recollection of how it happened.

A strong indication that this is in fact a sleep disorder would be if the shift worker experiences any of the following conditions:

- Sustains a serious injury while sleepwalking
- Actually leaves the house while sleepwalking
- Sleepwalks on a nightly basis

Breathing – Related Sleep Problems

Breathing related sleep problems have a broad range, from the relatively harmless condition of snoring to the serious even life threatening sleep disorder known as sleep apnea.

Snoring

Snoring is the most common of the breathing related sleep disorders. Even though it is considered common, snoring can sometimes become a serious problem. Snoring refers to the noise that is made when we breathe, (inhale) during sleep. The noise is a result of a partial blockage of the upper airway. As air from the nose or mouth passes around the partial blockage, the throat tissues vibrate and rattle, causing the sound of snoring. This type of snoring is called "Simple Snoring" which does not involve any episodes of non-breathing during sleep.

Symptoms:

Someone who is typically characterized as a simple snorer will have...

- No complaints from others about snoring
- No evidence of excessive sleepiness during the day
- No evidence of insomnia

Sleep Apnea

An episode of breathing failure during sleep is referred to as “Sleep Apnea”. This type of sleep disorder can cause very serious problems and can be fatal in extreme cases. During sleep apnea the shift worker will have recurring periods of complete obstruction in the upper airway during sleep. When the air can’t flow to the lungs at all it’s called “Apnea”. When apnea occurs the lungs are not getting fresh air and the brain tells the body to wake up just enough to unblock the air way. Because this action is repeated several times, the shift worker’s sleep is broken and never reaches the deep stages of sleep needed for good health.

Diagnosis:

A doctor can diagnose sleep apnea through a test called polysomnography. This test measures brain waves, muscle tension, eye movement, breathing, the oxygen level in the blood and auditory sounds.

Shift workers who experience sleep apnea are usually not aware that they stop breathing during the night. They will however exhibit symptoms that will indicate this disorder.

Symptoms:

- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dry mouth after waking
- Excessive perspiration
- Excessive sleepiness during the day
- High blood pressure
- Loud snoring
- Morning headaches
- Obesity
- Restless sleep

Risks:

Sleep apneas can be potentially a life threatening sleep disorder and if left untreated can lead to heart attack, heart disease, high blood pressure, impotence or stroke.

Take the Sleep Apnea Self Evaluation Quiz:

Some Shift Workers that snore may also suffer from sleep apnea. If you answer “YES” to any of these questions, please consult with your doctor.

- Are you overweight?
- Do you feel groggy or sleepy when you wake up?
- Do you feel sleepy during the day?
- Has anyone ever noticed you choking, gasping, or holding your breath during sleep?
- Is your snoring loud and long, annoying others in the house?

How to Get the Peaceful Sleep you Really Need

Work with your doctor to get the most out of your treatment plan to combat nightmares/terrors, sleepwalking, and sleep related breathing problems. This can help you get the quiet, restful sleep you need in order to wake up feeling alert, refreshed, and ready to face whatever your waking hours will hold.

By getting quality rest, the chances of suffering an accident at work will be reduced since you are not working “exhausted” all the time. Also your home life will improve, and the ability to do things without having that constant “drained” feeling be a realistic goal.

For more information contact a member of the SFL Shift Work Committee.

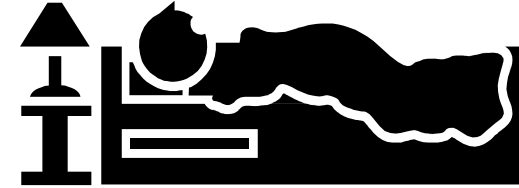
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SHIFT WORK AND SLEEP DISORDERS



Every night countless numbers of shift workers will struggle with various forms of sleep disorders.

They range from sleepwalking and night terrors to breathing difficulties, such as snoring and sleep apnea. There are at least 84 different sleeping and waking disorders that can interfere with your sleep.

Sleep disorders should be taken very seriously, due to the “exhaustion” the shift worker experiences. This can increase the risk of an accident at work or even traveling to and from the workplace.

If you are unsure if you are suffering from one or more sleep disorders, you have a wide range of health care professionals to choose from. A good start is your family doctor as well as psychiatrists, neurologists and even psychologists. All of these people are qualified to both diagnose and treat sleep disorders.

A strong indicator that any sleep disorder is more than an occasional problem is when you experience major amounts of personal distress in your everyday life. If you are experiencing any of these sleep disorders for more than a month, consult with your healthcare provider as soon as possible. It may be severe enough for referral to a sleep disorder specialist. With the major gains made in the area of sleep medicine, sleep disorders are being identified quicker and resulting in successful treatment.