

Night shift tips for contractors

Working night shifts can be challenging, especially when it comes to maintaining a healthy sleep routine. Here are some tailored tips to help you get the rest you need.



Limit caffeine before bedtime

Need a coffee to get through your shift? You're not alone. In the UK, we consume around 98 million cups of coffee daily. While caffeine can boost alertness, it stimulates the central nervous system, muscles (including the heart), and systems that control blood pressure, which can interfere with your sleep. Coffee isn't the only culprit; tea, energy drinks, and even chocolate also contain caffeine.

To ensure quality rest, avoid caffeine-containing foods and drinks at least four hours before bedtime. This can help you unwind and fall asleep more easily.



Use blackout curtains or blinds

Have you ever finished a night shift feeling exhausted, only to struggle to sleep once you're home? Blame the natural daylight—specifically the blue light it emits, which regulates your sleep-wake cycle. Invest in blackout curtains or blinds to significantly reduce daylight in your bedroom. Blocking out natural light can help you create a dark, sleep-conducive environment, making it easier to drift off.



Minimise light before bed

Maximising light at work makes sense when you need to stay awake; minimising light on the way home (and before bed) can help you wind down and fall asleep:

- Try wearing special blue light-blocking glasses while driving
- Reduce screen brightness or switch devices to "night mode" to limit blue light exposure



Leave work at work

Rail contractor jobs can be stressful, and high stress levels can disrupt sleep and impact mental health. Frustratingly, if you don't sleep well because you're worried, you might feel even lower and more anxious. So, what's the solution?

Practise disconnecting when you're off duty to manage stress and sleep more soundly. This is easier said than done, especially for dedicated contractors, but it's crucial for a healthy work-life balance.



Exercise every day

Regular exercise can help you get better, deeper sleep. But finding time to exercise can be tricky. Here are some tips:

- Join a fitness class
- Take the stairs instead of the lift
- Cycle to work, where possible, instead of driving/public transport

Important: Avoid exercising within three hours of bedtime as it boosts adrenaline, which can keep you awake.



Reduce nicotine intake

Nicotine, like caffeine, is a stimulant that disrupts the circadian rhythm, masks tiredness, and raises the risk of sleep apnea and other sleep-related health conditions. Research shows smokers get less and less restful sleep.

- Stop smoking or vaping at least three hours before bedtime
- For those looking to quit altogether, [NHS stop smoking](#) services can provide assistance



Find time to unwind

Devoting just one hour a day to "me time" can make it easier to unwind and get ready for restful sleep. Consider activities like:

- Reading a book
- Having a bath
- Speaking to friends or family on the phone

Unwinding at the same time every day helps your body and mind recognise that it's time to calm down and go to sleep.



Turn off your phone

It's best to keep your sleeping environment as tech-free as possible. Scrolling through social media just before bedtime can make it much harder to drift off. Blue light suppresses melatonin production and staring at a bright screen can cause eye strain and headaches.

- Put your smartphone away at least 30 minutes before sleep
- If you find it hard to leave your phone alone, activate "do not disturb" mode and place it somewhere hard to reach



Practise deep breathing

Deep breathing has an immediate and profound effect on the parasympathetic nervous system. It sends signals to your brain that everything is okay.

- **4-7-8 Exercise:** Breathe in for a count of four, hold for a count of seven, and breathe out for a count of eight. Repeat three more times to complete the exercise

And relax...

Hopefully, these tips will help you improve your sleep so that you feel more refreshed at work. If there are other ways you stay well-rested between shifts, let us know.