



Shift Work Circadian Disruption: A Sleep Disorder

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Description

Shift work circadian disruption is a sleep disorder that affects individuals who work non-traditional hours, such as overnight or rotating shifts. It occurs due to a misalignment between the body's internal circadian rhythm and the demands of the work schedule. This disruption can lead to various sleep-related problems and negatively impact overall health and well-being.

The circadian rhythm is the internal biological clock that regulates various physiological processes, including sleep and wake cycles. It is controlled by environmental cues, like exposure to light, which aids the human body in adapting to the natural day-night cycle. However, in shift workers, this natural synchronization between the internal clock and external environment becomes disrupted, leading to circadian misalignment.

The main cause of shift work circadian disruption is the irregular and unpredictable work schedule that disrupts the body's natural sleep-wake patterns. This disruption is also exacerbated by exposure to artificial light at night and lack of daylight during the day. Additionally, the constant shifting of sleep and wake times can make it challenging for the body to establish a consistent sleep routine.

Shift workers with circadian disruption often experience symptoms related to sleep deprivation and poor sleep quality. These symptoms

may include excessive daytime sleepiness, difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, decreased alertness and cognitive performance and mood disturbances. They may also be at an increased risk of accidents and have a higher prevalence of health issues such as cardiovascular problems, gastrointestinal disorders and metabolic disturbances.

Strategies that manage sleep quality

While it may be challenging to completely eliminate the effects of shift work circadian disruption, several strategies can help manage the disorder and improve sleep quality:

Sleep hygiene: Establishing a consistent sleep routine, creating a sleep-friendly environment and practicing relaxation techniques before bed can promote better sleep quality.

Light management: Minimizing exposure to bright light during the night shift and maximizing exposure to natural light during the waking hours can help regulate the circadian rhythm.

Napping: Strategic naps during break or before starting a night shift can alleviate fatigue and enhance alertness.

Healthy lifestyle: Maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in regular physical activity and avoiding stimulants like caffeine and nicotine close to bedtime can support overall sleep health.

Sleep aids: In some cases, sleep aids prescribed by a healthcare professional may be used temporarily to help shift workers adjust their sleep schedule or improve sleep quality.

Conclusion

Shift work circadian disruption is a sleep disorder that can significantly impact the sleep patterns and overall well-being of individuals working non-traditional hours. The irregular work schedule and exposure to artificial light can disrupt the body's circadian rhythm, leading to sleep-related problems and potential health consequences. However, by implementing appropriate sleep hygiene practices, managing light exposure and adopting a healthy lifestyle, individuals with shift work circadian disruption can better manage their sleep and minimize the adverse effects of this disorder. It is important for both employers and employees to recognize the importance of prioritizing sleep health in shift work environments and implement strategies to mitigate the negative impact of circadian disruption.

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