**How to… Tackle a night shift**

It’s the shift you’ve been dreading. The one you look out for when your rota gets sent out (likely days before you start your job, rather than the contract-mandated 6 weeks…). The shift you’ll send endless ‘sad-face’ snapchats about. That’s right: welcome to #TeamNightShift.

Before you take possession of the soon-to-be-hated bleep, there are a few things you should take into account. The most important take-home message from this guide is that night shifts as an FY1 or FY2 doctor are extremely **variable***.* You will have horrific nights that you’ll remember for the rest of your career, and you will have night shifts that are so chilled you’ll think you’re doing a placement in the Antarctic. Or Aberdeen.

Despite this, you should prepare to be busy. To do this, simply follow our helpful tips!

**Step 1: Get to know your sleeping pattern**

Everyone approaches night shifts very differently, and this will be determined by the shifts in the days preceding your nights. There’s generally 3 approaches to night shifts:

* **Stay up progressively later and later** in the two or three days prior to starting nights. Rotas sometimes include ‘late’ (for example 4pm-midnight) type shifts prior to nights, which ease the transition.
* **Stay up all night the night before their shift**, and go to sleep at 6am or 7am. This is when a Netflix binge (other video streaming sites are available!) comes in handy. Then you can get a solid 8, 10 or even 12 hour sleep prior to your shift. Luxury!
* **Keep their sleeping patterns the same prior to nights**, get up early on the day of their shift, and have the odd nap during the day. This means that they are exhausted on their first night, but if they power through, their body clock can adjust. These people are known as ‘machines’.

Other things to consider:

* **Invest in some black out blinds** - it can be challenging sleeping during the day if light is streaming in through the windows. Or you can pick up some cheap black-out material to tape onto the windows for the crack-den-chic look.
* You will often feel a bit ‘jetlagged’ during nights. A helpful tip may be to **mentally ‘flip’ your timings by 12 hours**. Pretend 3am is like 3pm on a long day shift. This can be easier to stomach!

**Step 2: Eat well**

Nights are long shifts, and, due a wicked combination of your deranged body clock and your jobs list, you may even forget to eat. Not only do tried doctors make mistakes, but so do those running on empty!

* **Buy decent food** in advance, you may not have much of an appetite at 2am so try to make it as appealing as possible. You need fuel to function
* Roughly plan your mealtimes and **make an effort to take breaks**.
* **Tell the nurses when you are taking breaks** and ask them not to bleep you. You’d be surprised how well this works!
* The occasional **nights-team takeaway** on the final shift is always a delicious bonding experience also!

**Step 3: Get organised**

The best way to manage your jobs list is to be pro-active and organised. This will save you **so** much stress!

* **Keep a proper written list**, it helps you keep track of your jobs and you have the therapeutic benefit of crossing them off afterwards. Some very efficient [or anal-retentive – Editor] F1s have been known to colour code the list to help them visualize what needs to be done
* **Prioritise**! Not just by urgency but by location. Hospitals are BIG places so try to do as much on one ward at once before traipsing to the next.
* Don’t necessarily go looking for jobs, but **anticipate them**. If you know that ward 5 inevitably bleep with a mountain of fluid prescribing tasks, make a note of this.
* **Do a sweep of the wards as you start** so you can gauge how busy things are and tackle some of the more straightforward things early on
* **Introduce yourself to the ward teams.**
* **Give them a sheet of paper** where they can write down non-urgent jobs. Tell them you will work your way around the wards and get to these when you can, rather than them constantly bleeping you.

**Step 4: Be friendly with the teams**

During night shifts, everyone just wants to get to the end of the night with all their jobs done and unfortunately this often leads to lots of bleeps to the FY1. The nursing team are not bleeping you to give you extra work – they just want the best care for their patients .
Therefore, if you are tired, frustrated and want to throw your bleep through the nearest window follow the following tips:

* Try to stop, **take a breath and think**. Think about all the times you have asked for help on the wards and try to act as you wanted others to treat you then
* If you’re busy, **go to the team and clearly explain how busy you are**, and they will be more than understanding.
* **Always be courteous to other team members** no matter how frustrated, tired or busy you are. The fastest way to de rail a night shift is to start a fight with the nursing team.
* **Offering the occasional cup of tea** will work wonders, and will often indirectly will reduce your stress.

The nursing teams will be there to look after you – many a doctor has been taken aside on a night shift, offered tea and toast and given much-needed respite!

**Step 5: Know where to go for help**

This tip stands for all on-call shifts, but is worth repeating. Know your medical registrar or surgical registrar bleep. Ask for help. It is literally what they are there for. You’re not expected to look after hundreds of patients by yourself: know your limits!

**Step 6: Take breaks**

As mentioned before, nights can be extremely variable. Some nights will seem busier than a toy shop on Christmas Eve, whilst others will be ridiculously peaceful. On the quiet nights consider the following:

* The first thing to do is to **check that your bleep is working**. Is the battery in? Have you ‘accidently’ smashed it into 100 pieces with a drip stand? Try bleeping yourself to make sure.
* **You can go looking for jobs, you can pop down to the Acute Medical (or Surgical) Unit and offer help, or you can chill out**. There is no right answer. Offering to help elsewhere is very kind and noble, however has its downsides. You never know when you will be bleeped next, and therefore sometimes your stop-start efforts can actually be more problematic on an admissions ward than helpful. If you go looking for jobs: good for you. You have more willpower than us.
* **Taking breaks is NOT a bad thing**. You are quite literally ‘on call’: there to provide an emergency service. You should not feel guilty if you have nothing to do. Make the most of it and be oppurtunistic: you never know when your next bleep will be coming! One or two (unnamed) medics have been known to bring in books, slankets (!) or even their games console into work to play the latest Pro Evolution Soccer game during nights. We at Medisense would never advocate this. FIFA is much better.

Night shifts are tough, but often rewarding and memorable for good reasons. You can learn so much in a short space of time and they will help you ‘make it’ as a doctor. There is an art to preparing yourself appropriately so you can be as safe and competent as possible – this is what your patients deserve. Remember, most of all, to look after each other. After all, you are #TeamNightShift!