

## TOOLBOX TALK #46

### **CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS AND SLEEP: WHY THEY MATTER**

Your 24-hour internal clocks – or circadian rhythms – can affect how your body functions, your mental health and your behavior. Perhaps the most well-known circadian rhythm is the sleep-awake cycle, which determines how sleepy or alert you feel throughout the day and night. While the body's internal clock is naturally aligned with the cycle of day and night, travel, work, or an underlying issue can disrupt your circadian rhythm.



For people who travel for work, this means jet lag is a very real concern. And then there's shift work, which prevents workers from sleeping according to their natural circadian rhythms.

People who work during the night and sleep during the day often suffer from sleep deprivation. Keeping a consistent routine and sleep schedule is one of the most important things you can do to maintain a healthy circadian rhythm.

Here are some tips from the Sleep Foundation that workers can use to stay consistent with sleep:

- **Maintain a regular schedule.** When possible, eat your meals, go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- **Follow a bedtime routine.** Choose a couple of relaxing activities, such as taking a warm bath or stretching, and do them before bed every night.
- **Exercise daily.** Aim for 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity every week.
- **Avoid naps late in the day.** They interfere with your ability to fall asleep.
- **Avoid light exposure before bed.** Electronics can inhibit melatonin production. Melatonin is the hormone that helps us regulate our sleep.
- **Get some sunlight during the day.** If you feel tired during the day, spend some time outside.

If you're a shift worker or frequent traveler, consult with your doctor about how to minimize misalignments between your circadian rhythms, your sleep schedule and your environment.