

# Night Shift Sleep Plan


A practical guide for protecting sleep, recovery,  
and energy when your schedule works against  
your body.



# When Your Schedule Works Against You

Night shift asks your body to do something it was never designed to do: sleep while the rest of the world is active. Sunlight floods through windows. Neighbors mow lawns. Phones buzz. Your body's internal clock, driven by daylight cues, keeps sending signals to stay awake and alert at the exact moment you need to be shutting down.

This is not a willpower problem. It is a biology problem. The good news is that small, consistent changes to your environment and habits can reduce the friction and help you get more usable rest out of every sleep window you have.

 Night shift officers consistently report shorter sleep duration and lower sleep quality than day shift peers. Protecting your sleep window is part of the job.

## Protect Your Sleep Window

Before anything else, decide when your window is and commit to it. Consistency is one of the most powerful tools for improving sleep quality on any schedule.

1

### What time will I try to sleep?

Write in a fixed target time and hold to it as often as possible, even on off days. Your body builds rhythm from repetition.

2

### What time do I need to wake up?

Count backward from your wake time to confirm you are protecting at least 7 hours. Block that window like a mandatory appointment.

3

### What can I reduce or avoid during that window?

Identify the specific disruptions in your life: family noise, social obligations, phone notifications. Name them so you can plan around them.

# Control Light and Noise

Your environment is either working for you or against you. Daytime sleep requires deliberate setup. These adjustments are low cost and high impact.



## Dark Room

Use blackout curtains or a quality eye mask. Even small amounts of light signal wakefulness to your brain and cut into deep sleep cycles.



## White Noise or Fan

Consistent background sound masks sudden disruptions like traffic, voices, or doors. A box fan or white noise app both work well.



## Phone on Silent

Set a Do Not Disturb schedule that matches your sleep window. Allow calls only from essential contacts during that time.



## Let Others Know

Tell household members your sleep window. A simple note on the door or a shared calendar entry reduces interruptions without conflict.

# Caffeine and Food Check

What you consume in the hours before sleep has a direct effect on how quickly you fall asleep and how deeply you stay there. Getting this right does not require major changes, just honest awareness of your current habits.

## When is my last caffeine cutoff?

Caffeine has a half-life of roughly 5 to 6 hours. If you plan to sleep at 8am, your last cup should be no later than 2 to 3am. Mark your cutoff time and stick to it.

## Am I eating too heavy too close to sleep?

Large, high-fat meals in the final hour before bed force your digestive system to stay active and can interrupt sleep onset and quality. Aim for lighter options as your shift winds down.

## What helps me feel steady without keeping me wired?

Identify 2 or 3 go-to foods or drinks that give you calm, sustained energy rather than a sharp spike. Water, a small protein snack, or herbal tea work well for many officers.

# Recovery Between Shifts

Recovery does not happen by accident. Build a simple, repeatable plan you can follow even on the hardest nights. Fill in each section and keep it somewhere visible.

## Sleep Window

Target sleep time and wake time. Write it down. Protect it from both ends.

## Wind-Down Routine

A short sequence of 2 to 3 actions that signals to your body that sleep is coming: dim lights, change clothes, no screens.

## Food and Water Plan

What you will eat and drink after shift and before sleep. Stay hydrated. Avoid the heavy post-shift meal right before lying down.

## One Recovery Action

Pick one thing: a short walk, 10 minutes of stretching, 5 minutes outside. One consistent action builds momentum over time.



Wind Down

Sleep  
Window

Recharge

# Closing Reminder

You may not control the schedule, but you can protect the recovery around it.

Every officer who works nights is managing a real biological challenge. The goal is not perfection. The goal is consistency. Small, deliberate steps taken repeatedly over time will improve your sleep, your recovery, and your ability to perform when it counts most.

## Start Tonight

Choose one change from this plan and apply it to your next sleep window. One step is enough to begin building a better pattern.

## Stay Consistent

Your body responds to repetition. A consistent sleep window, even an imperfect one, beats a perfect schedule you follow once.

## Talk to Someone

If sleep problems are persistent, speak with a department wellness officer or your primary care provider. You do not have to manage this alone.

