

Night shift workers need support to manage weight and metabolic health conditions, says study

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Work based policies must be designed to target barriers that night shift workers face when managing weight and metabolic health conditions, a

Monash University-led review has found.

Making up 13%–27% of the workforce, there are no systems in place to assist night shift workers to make healthier lifestyle choices, despite having an increased risk of [weight](#) gain, and a higher risk of weight-related conditions such as type 2 diabetes and [cardiovascular disease](#).

Published in [Obesity Reviews](#), the mixed-methods [systematic review](#) which was led by the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food at Monash University, investigated the barriers that night shift workers face in enabling them to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Such barriers identified in eight studies in Australia, Sweden, Nigeria, the U.S., and Botswana include:

- Personal—[time constraints](#), fatigue, stress
- Social—work routines and cultural norms
- Organizational—work-related fatigue, lack of routine, limited healthy food options at night, lack of meal breaks
- Community—limited healthy food options surrounding work at night.

First author Corinne Davis, Ph.D. candidate from the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food at Monash University, said, "The fatigue and disruption to routine that often accompanies working at night is challenging for night shift workers and we need to make it easier for them to choose healthier food options."

The review also analyzed the data from 12 [intervention](#) studies in in Europe, Australia, U.S. and Canada. It found the studies targeting weight management behaviors for night shift workers demonstrated limited weight loss results, with only one intervention reporting a clinically significant weight loss result. The existing interventions had largely

focused on addressing only a limited number of barriers faced by night shift workers.

Senior author Professor Maxine Bonham, from Monash University's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, said, "Night shift workers are critical to our 24-hour society, yet interventions to improve their health fail to acknowledge the physiological and behavioral challenges of their work schedule."

The authors called for more research that takes into consideration the complexities of shift work and consideration of weight loss approaches that account for timing and quality of food intake as well as exploring the impact of sleep quality for night shift workers on weight management. Future interventions should also focus on eliminating the key barriers faced by night shift workers such as facilitating the availability of healthier food options within the workplace at night.

"It is critical that interventions for night shift workers are designed to target the known enablers and barriers identified by [night shift workers](#)," they wrote.

More information: Corinne Davis et al, Conceptualizing weight management for night shift workers: A mixed-methods systematic review, *Obesity Reviews* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/obr.13659](https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.13659)

Provided by Monash University

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