

Doing a Double can be Double Trouble, including more Mistakes: What you Need to do if you Decide to Work a Double-Shift



Working a double shift is pretty common for many nurses. Some nurses choose to work a double, while others are mandated to do so. For those who choose to do a double, review the following guidelines to ensure you are making the right choice.

1. Assess your level of performance: in order to find out if a double makes sense, ask yourself how you feel at the end of a regular shift: if you find yourself tired with diminished capacity to make important decisions, then a double is probably not a good choice.

2. Acknowledge when your decision is not working: if you do decide to do double-shifts and you find yourself making more mistakes than usual (especially mistakes of a critical nature) then admit that this is probably not a wise decision.

3. Consider your age and level of fitness: when a nurse is younger with more energy and stamina, perhaps a double shift may be a feasible option for awhile; however, older nurses with less energy and stamina may find a double to be too much of an energy drain. Also, consider your level of fitness: if you aren't fit, then doing a double may adversely affect your overall health.

4. Double-shift habit: if you get into the habit of doing doubles, ask yourself how it is working for you over time; as previously mentioned, if you see yourself continually making mistakes that are linked to fatigue, then your answer is probably to reduce your hours. However, if you really have a yen for a double, then choose to do a double only after you are well rested.

5. Money: the money is very enticing, and nurses are in demand, so the opportunity to work a double is usually available. Beyond doing a double, see if you can find other ways of bringing in extra money, such as working on weekends and holidays when possible.

6. Get those zzz: if you do work a double, make sure you get enough quality sleep prior to your shift. It is best to be well rested before taking on shifts that require more than eight hours of work.

7. Eat well: make sure you have enough protein and other nutrients in your diet, so that your brain and body can function optimally. Living on a diet of fast food with liberal amounts of sugar and caffeine is not good nutrition; prepare your own food and bring it to work, if possible so that you can maintain good nutrition while at work.

8. Other factors: consider the type of support from your medical team. If you are not only doing a double shift but also performing double the amount of work due to a lack of team support, then ask yourself if it is worth the stress to do a double when you lack the support of a well-functioning team.

9. Performance and your manager: if your manager expresses concern about a rising number of mistakes made when you work a double, your performance review could suffer. Rather than risk a poor performance review, take your cue and reduce your hours.

While doing a double may be very common, the problems associated with fatigue due to double shifts are raising a big red flag in the field of health care. If you choose to be a conscientious nurse, think twice before taking on a double shift.

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