

Contract caterer investigates how nutrition can better support night shift workers

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A major UK contract caterer is investigating how nutrition can better support nightshift workers after publishing a white paper on the topic.

Eurest, part of Compass Group UK & Ireland's Business and Industry (B&I) division, believes food and beverage service could help alleviate some of the impacts associated with working alternative hours – and is calling for further research.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) says 8.7m people in the UK work at night, including in factories, warehouses, retail, call centres and the public sector.

They could all be at risk of significant health impacts that range from sleep disorder to poor physical and mental health.

Poor sleep has been linked to a range of long-term health impacts, including an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, obesity, depression, heart attack and stroke. In fact, Shift Work Sleep Disorder (SWSD) is now a recognised and diagnosable condition.

Ryan Holmes, Culinary Director at Eurest, said: "A healthy, nutritious diet that supports wellbeing is crucial for those who work shift patterns, and now is the right time to think about how we change the culture around catering provision to support them better.

"More research is needed on the impact of shift work on the body and looking at the best possible times to eat at night. As well as exploring the positive impact a healthier diet could have on weight management and keeping diseases such as type 2 diabetes at bay.

“Most of all, we need to listen to shift workers and what they want. Healthy options should be easily available, allowing people to resist the urge to go for items high in fat or sugar when they are tired and lacking in resolve.”

Eurest’s white paper *Catering for the night shift* includes a survey of night shift workers as well as interviews with nutritionists, wellbeing physiologists and academic researchers.

It found 78% change their eating patterns to match their work/sleep pattern, although 48% have only one break per night shift.

Contributor Dr Rachel Gibson, Registered Dietitian and Lecturer in the Department of Nutritional Sciences at King’s College London, said: “It is likely that shift workers have a double burden of dietary risk, due to eating less healthy diets and eating during the night.

“Working shifts requires employees to alter many aspects of daily behaviour – such as time of sleeping, activities and eating.

“Studies have shown that shift working employees make less healthy food choices. Diet patterns reported in night workers are typically low in fruit, vegetables and fibre and higher in sugary snack foods and drinks, for instance.”

Eurest’s own research confirmed those facts.

Ryan Holmes added: “We identified that health and nutrition is so important with night feeding. Having a different sleep pattern fundamentally goes against what the body wants to do – so, we need to give people the right food to stay alert, stay awake and stay well.

“As a result, we completely changed our catering offer for a large client in the tech sector following a research project.

“We hope that further academic and industry research can drive a continued focus on the issue.”

For more information, please visit: www.eurest.co.uk.