



Occupational Health  
Clinics for Ontario  
Workers Inc.

Centres de santé  
des travailleurs (ses)  
de l'Ontario Inc.

Sudbury Clinic  
84 Cedar Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Sudbury Ontario P3E 1A5  
Tel: (705) 523-2330  
Fax: (705) 523-2606  
1-800-461-7120  
E-mail: [sudbury@ohcow.on.ca](mailto:sudbury@ohcow.on.ca)  
Website:  
[www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury](http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury)

### **Anxiety, Depression, and Shift work**

It may seem foreign to some, but to approximately 30% of employed Canadians, shift work is everyday life. Defined as “work outside day hours, Monday to Friday” it is a necessity to keep our busy lives on track and things running smoothly. However, there are things that may potentially result from shift work that are not necessary for life and in fact have a negative effect on the people dealing with it. Sleep deprivation, the disruption of social and family life, and gastrointestinal problems are all issues that seem to plague shift workers. There are also issues that are not so evident. Mental or emotional problems that might arise or worsen from having your body thrown off its normal cycle. Anxiety and depression have been linked to shift work, as well as changes in mental and physical performance at work. Symptoms of anxiety include worrying, and poor concentration. Depression has characteristics such as depressed mood, and poor concentration, thinking and decision making. Both include sleep disturbances and fatigue. When combining such symptoms with a daily routine that involves constant sleep deprivation, the outcome does not look good.

The lighter side of the issue is that there is medication that can be taken to hopefully control the symptoms that arise from anxiety and depression. However, the side effects of these medications must be monitored closely themselves. Participants of a study done in

the UK <sup>(1)</sup> reported that at times they found it difficult to distinguish between the effects of the symptoms of their anxiety and depression and the effects of the medication they were taking. Their symptoms included confusion, dizziness and lack of concentration. It has also been noted that shift work can have an influence on the physiological response to the drugs. Heavy work in the heat (ie. Mine) may lead to dehydration, which can lead to affected levels of medication concentrations on the blood. That is not to say no medication would be beneficial, as the side effects of the actual illness are most likely to be greater than that of the medication.

Awareness and knowledge are key factors in the prevention of harming yourself or others. Make sure that you feel that you are fully informed on all aspects of your medication and its effects. Employers must also do their part in becoming aware of the potential illnesses that may plague their employees and help them to feel safe and comfortable about the issue. Mental illness is something that affects you internally so you will be the best judge of what is going on internally.

**Sara Riach is a 4<sup>th</sup> year placement student from Laurentian University in the Health Promotions Program with the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Inc. For more information, or to make a request for a future article, please contact OHCOW @ (705) 523-2330.**

## **Reference**

Haslam, C., Atkinson, S., Brown, S., & Haslam, R. A. (2005). Perceptions of the impact of depression and anxiety and the medication for these conditions on safety in the workplace. *Occupational Environmental Medicine*, 62, 538-545, doi: 10.1136/oem.2004.016196