

Coping with Charge of Quarters

Typically Charge of Quarters requires service members tasked to guard the front entrance of the barracks for 24 hours, followed by a release of duties the following day. One of the main challenges service members face with charge of quarters is the adverse impact on their sleep. Several strategies have been found to help shift workers improve their quality and quantity of sleep, which can be applied to the Charge of Quarters situation:

Before CQ:

- **Try a short nap before you go to work.** Even 20 minutes can be helpful. It can maintain or improve alertness, performance, and mood. Even if you feel groggy or sleepier after a quick nap, those feelings usually pass within 15 minutes, but the benefits of the nap may last for many hours.
- **Use caffeine judiciously.**
- **Get exposure to bright outside light.**

During CQ:

- **Stop caffeine consumption at least 10 hours before you to go to sleep.** This is because caffeine has a half-life (i.e., time it takes for half to get out of your body) of about 5 hours, and can keep you awake as long as 10 hours later.
- **Avoid smoking before going to bed,** its chemicals can provide a stimulatory effect therefore decreasing the ability to sleep.
- **Don't drink too many fluids,** especially within 2 hours of getting off work, as this can wake you up during the day when trying to sleep.
- **Avoid large heavy meals.** The stomach doesn't function the same at night as it does during the day. Large heavy meals could cause indigestion and other problems.
- **Get up and get active.** If you can, get up and get active during the night, and vary your activities. This can improve alertness.

After CQ:

- **Wear wraparound dark glasses** on your way home from work to keep morning sunlight from activating your internal daytime clock.
- **Go to sleep as soon as possible after work.**
- **Eat a light snack before bedtime.**
- **Try to sleep only about 4.5 hours,** so you will be sleepy enough to go to bed at a reasonable time the next night. Social activities and other things can be scheduled after.
- **Put a "do not disturb" sign on the front door** so that delivery people and friends won't knock or ring the doorbell.
- **Turn off the Phone.**
- **Follow your regular pre-bedtime routine** before bed.
- **Make sure your sleeping environment is comfortable** (cool constant temperature, good airflow, **dark** and **quiet**). If there is outside noise, a constant background noise may help you sleep (e.g., relaxation tapes, radio).
- **Don't expect to go to bed on time the next night.** Because you stayed up all night the night before, you likely have delayed your sleep schedule some and it will take a few nights to get back to normal.

The role of the family:

- Possibly the most important factor regarding coping effectively with CQ is the support of the partner and family.

- **Ask family and friends to help** create a quiet and peaceful setting during your sleep time.
 - Have them wear headphones while listening to music or watching TV.
 - Ban vacuuming, dishwashing, and noisy games during your sleep time.
- **Talk with family and friends about missing family activities, entertainment, and other social interactions** so you can get the needed sleep during the day.
- **A partner may stop doing activities they would normally do around the home and instead leave the house for a short period of time** so that the service member can sleep (this may also involve taking the children out [e.g., to the park, shopping]).
- Have a regular routine (also called sleep hygiene) before bed, irrespective of sleeping during the day or night. For example, having a shower or bath, spending 30 minutes relaxing (e.g., meditation, light exercise, reading a book), clean teeth, etc then go to bed at a set time. By keeping a regular routine, the body learns when it is expected to sleep (or when it is wanted).

It is important to know, you will likely not get as much sleep after CQ than your normally would. However, this is something you can survive. The key is to make sleep a priority!!