

The Cognitive Cost of Work: Protecting Your Organization's Mental Capital

A systematic review identifies **shift work**, **chronic stress**, and **excessive hours** as major threats to cognitive functions, increasing immediate risks and accelerating long-term decline.

The "Big Three" Risks to Brain Health



Night Shift Work

30–50% higher accident risk on night shifts

Circadian disruption and sleep deficiency significantly impair reaction time and vigilance.



Burnout creates "Cognitive Inflexibility"

Chronic stress impairs the executive functions needed to adapt to changing situations.



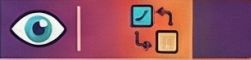
Prolonged Hours 55+ hour weeks mental decline

Excessive hours are linked to lower reasoning scores and faster long-term cognitive aging.



Comparing Cognitive Impairment by Risk Factor

Night Shift Work



Sustained Attention & Working Memory

Occupational Stress



Executive Function & Memory Retrieval

Prolonged Hours



Verbal Reasoning & Processing Speed

Evidence-Based Organizational Solutions



Optimize shift rotation patterns

Use forward-rotating schedules (Day → Evening → Night) and limit consecutive night shifts.



Increase worker autonomy to buffer stress

Giving employees more control over task pacing reduces the cognitive impact of stress.



Legitimate the "Right to Disconnect"

Protect non-work hours to ensure the brain can fully recover between shifts.

