Rest, Rehydrate, Refuel

Resource for
RCN members

R Rest

R Rehydrate

R Refuel

What can you do to help yourself?

Rest

- If you are able to, take your rest breaks. Don't feel guilty – a rest break is not a luxury but there for patient safety as well as yours. Don't get into a habit of skipping breaks. We all have a role to play in encouraging a culture of taking breaks.

- If you are not able to take your break and you are concerned that tiredness may be impacting on patient safety, raise it with your line manager and fill in an incident form. If this is too time-consuming, you could keep a tally of missed breaks over a stretch of working days and complete one form rather than a new one each time.

- Ask for feedback from your manager on what action is being taken to address missed breaks – you should receive feedback if you have filled in incident forms.

- Let your RCN rep know about regular missed breaks, so that they can raise issues regarding a particular ward or department through forums like the health and safety committee.

Rehydrate

- Come onto a shift well hydrated and ensure that you keep hydrated during your shift.

- Look out for the warning signs of dehydration and act.

- Role model behaviours and encourage your colleagues to keep hydrated.

- If you are not able to access drinking water, speak to your manager or raise it with your RCN workplace representative – this is not acceptable and could be a breach of health and safety law.

Refuel

- Don't go to work hungry, as that may lead to unhealthy choices later in the shift.

- If you know access to food may be difficult, for example if the hospital shops/canteen are closed or if you are on the road, bring in some additional snacks such as almonds, bananas or similar non-refrigerated foods.

- During night shifts avoid heavy, fatty and spicy meals and stick to snacks or easily digestible foods.

Rest, rehydrate, refuel

The RCN's *Healthy workplace, healthy you* campaign aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the nursing workforce. As part of this campaign we are encouraging health and social care managers to ensure staff are taking their at-work breaks, are well hydrated and have access to nutritional food. We are also encouraging nursing staff to self-care and assert their right to a break.

With the RCN continuing to campaign for safe and effective staffing levels in each country of the UK, we do recognise that it is a particularly challenging time in terms of workforce shortages. There will be occasions where nursing staff miss their breaks but when this becomes a regular occurrence, or seen as the norm, it is unsustainable. If nursing staff are not enabled to self-care and have a poor working environment, they are more likely to become unwell, burn out or want to leave the job.

In 2018 a House of Commons select committee report recognised the importance of rest breaks and access to hot food and drink for nursing staff and called on the Chief Nursing Officer to take a lead and ensure nursing staff are working in safe and acceptable working conditions (House of Commons, 2018).
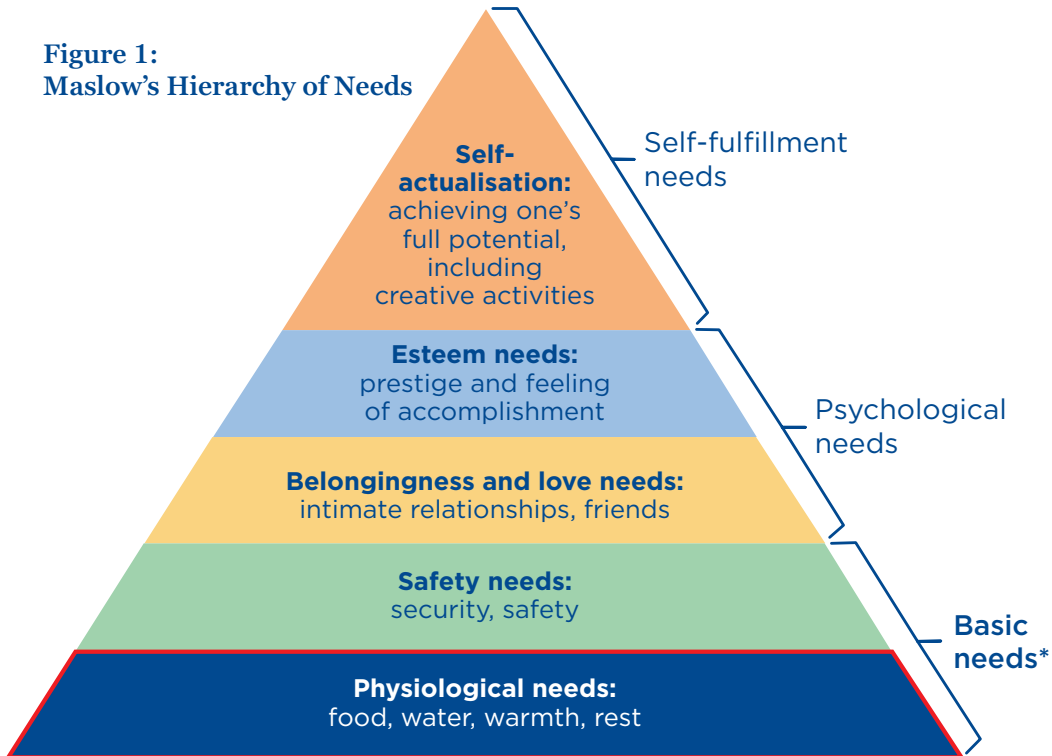
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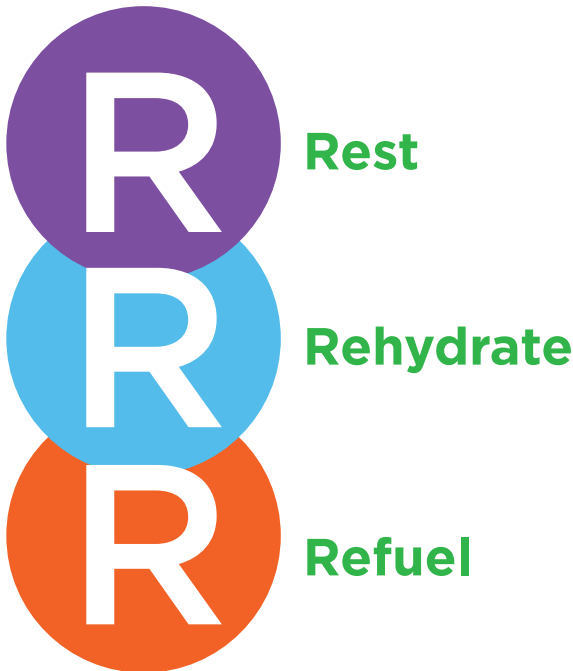
Why is it important?

Whenever you travel on an aeroplane you will get the all-important safety briefing, and one of the key phrases they use is 'Put your oxygen mask on first before helping others'. In other words, you can't look after others' safety before you have looked after your own.

Applying this to nursing staff, it is essential that nursing staff take care of themselves in order to care for their patients. The Nursing and Midwifery Council's Code also requires you to maintain the level of health you need to carry out your professional role. (NMC 2016)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see Figure 1 below) identifies the physiological needs of rest, water and food as key. As this applies to the patients and clients you care for, it should also apply to you.

Figure 1:
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Self-actualisation: achieving one's full potential, including creative activities

Self-fulfillment needs

Esteem needs: prestige and feeling of accomplishment

Belongingness and love needs: intimate relationships, friends

Psychological needs

Safety needs: security, safety

Physiological needs: food, water, warmth, rest

Basic needs*

*also referred to as fundamentals of nursing care

Employer's responsibility

We recognise that it can be a challenge to self-care when the environment or managers are not supportive, but employers have a legal duty to support your health and welfare at work.

Rights to at-work breaks are enshrined in the Working Time Regulations 1998, which allow staff who work for more than six hours a day to have a minimum of a 20-minute break away from their immediate workstation.

Issues such as access to drinking water and somewhere to rest away from your immediate work environment are also enshrined in health and safety law, namely the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992.

Irrespective of health and safety legislation, it is important for patient safety that nursing staff are rested and able to rehydrate and refuel, particularly during a long shift. There is evidence to suggest that both fatigue and dehydration can affect cognition, making errors more likely.

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Further information and help

Use your collective voice to get improvements in your working environment, be it better rest facilities or better access to healthy food during a night shift – at times of shortages in nursing staff you cannot be ignored.

Get the support of the RCN via your RCN workplace representative and if you don't have an RCN workplace rep or need further support or information please contact RCN Direct on 0345 772 6100.

RCN (2014) *A Shift in the Right Direction* – shift work **www.rcn.org.uk/publications**

Healthy workplace, healthy you resources (including *Nursing you* resource on healthy weight) **www.rcn.org.uk/healthyworkplace**

NHS Choices **www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx**

House of Commons (2018) *The Nursing Workforce, Second report of the Health Committee Session 2017-19* Available at **www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/publications/** (accessed 5 February 2018)

HSE guidance on welfare at work **www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l24.htm**

HSE Northern Ireland guidance on welfare at work **www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/welfare-facilities**

RCN Direct advice guides on working time regulations, shift work and rest breaks and employment rights **www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/rcn-advice**

Royal College of Nursing