The End-of-Shift Recovery Checklist

Making it home physically is only half the job, so use these steps to come down from the shift on purpose and walk through your front door present.

01 LEAVING THE SHIFT

- [ ] Stop caffeine in the second half of your shift. Its half-life is about 5 to 6 hours, so late coffee is still in your system at bedtime.
- [ ] After a bad call, run a debrief or talk it through with a peer. Address the stress instead of stuffing it down.
- [ ] Know what your post-shift meal is before you leave. It should be ready to eat with zero preparation.

02 THE DRIVE HOME

- [ ] **Build a buffer zone.** Take a longer route home or stop at a park for ten minutes.
- [ ] No news and no work calls. Play music or a podcast that has nothing to do with the job.
- [ ] Drink 20 oz of water as you get off or on the drive home.
- [ ] Sit in the driveway for 5 minutes before you open the front door. Use it to process the shift and breathe.
- [ ] **Breathe on purpose.** Box breathing (inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4), or two or three physiological sighs: a full inhale through the nose, a short second inhale, then a slow, complete exhale through the mouth.

03 THE FIRST HOUR HOME

- [ ] **Tell your family what you need.** “I had a rough shift. I need fifteen minutes of quiet time before I can talk.” It takes five seconds.
- [ ] Change out of your uniform and duty boots right away. Shower if you can and wash the shift off.
- [ ] Put your phone in another room for the first thirty minutes.
- [ ] Got pent-up energy? Ten minutes of stretching, a short walk, or a quick mobility routine.
- [ ] Eat a simple recovery meal: a protein shake and fruit, yogurt and fruit with granola, or an açaí bowl.
- [ ] If irritability rises or a call keeps replaying, use **5-4-3-2-1**: name 5 things you see, 4 you feel, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

04 BEFORE SLEEP

- [ ] **Screens off** at least an hour before you plan to sleep. Read a book instead.
- [ ] Make the room dark, quiet, and cool: blackout curtains, a sleep mask, a fan. Eliminate every source of light, especially when you sleep during the day.
- [ ] Run a short pre-sleep routine: a hot shower, light stretching, or a few minutes of deep breathing to signal it is time to power down.
- [ ] As much as the job allows, go to bed and wake up around the same time, even on rotating shifts.

05 THE NEXT MORNING

- [ ] If you wear a tracker, take your HRV reading every morning for two weeks. Don't judge the numbers. Just collect the data.
- [ ] Notice how a rough shift, a night of poor sleep, or a few beers shows up in your score the next day.
- [ ] If your HRV is low, make it an active recovery day: mobility work, a light jog, or yoga.
- [ ] Start with one or two of these steps. Get them down, then add more.

Take control of the transition.
The shift is over. Be present.

When It Is More Than a Rough Night

If you are struggling to control your temper at home, or you feel numb to your family, don't ignore it. Seek support from a culturally competent therapist who understands first responder work.

GO DEEPER

More free recovery, sleep, and nutrition protocols: optimumvalor.com/blog
Recharge and Recover, my short, practical guide to taking your recovery back on your terms, on Kindle: amazon.com/dp/B0HMYHW1JR

WRITTEN BY
Antonio M. Scott | Lieutenant | PN-1 Nutrition Coach | PN-1 SSR Coach | ACE GFI
OPTIMUMVALOR.COM

This checklist is general education, not medical advice. Talk with a qualified health professional about any sleep, health, or mental health concern.