

The Ultimate

Shift
SURVIVAL
Guide

For New Nurses

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The Day Shift.....	3
Chapter 2: The Evening Shift.....	8
Elite Yearbook	11
Chapter 3: The Night Shift.....	14
Chapter 4: Mixed Rotations	16
Chapter 5: Tales from the Bedside	22
About Elite Learning	24

Shift Survival 101: What’s Inside the Guide

Nursing is a rewarding career with unlimited opportunities for growth and learning. The profession offers nurses a huge variety of work environments, types of patients, and schedules.

For some nurses, having a variety of scheduling options allows for more family time or the ability to travel. Others find working weekends, nights, and evenings more of a challenge.

We asked hundreds of nurses across the country about their experiences working different types of shifts. These results showed that each scheduling structure came with its own benefits and challenges. What works well for one nurse may be difficult for another. New nurses must often spend a few weeks working their chosen schedule, figuring out how to make it work for them.

This Shift Survival Guide was created using real-life experience and advice from experienced nurses to help new nurses navigate shift work and decide what might work best for their career and lifestyle.

Chapter 1:

The Day Shift



Many nurses prefer working a day shift schedule. Day shifts are often the busiest, with team collaboration, procedures, scans, admissions, and discharges keeping nurses occupied throughout the shift.

This chapter explores what nurses enjoy about the fast-paced nature of the day shift, along with the stress that comes with working such a demanding shift.

Introduction to the Day Shift

Most day shifts are 12 hours long and start sometime between 5 and 7 in the morning. Nurses who work the day shift must have good time management skills and be able to prioritize effectively. Flexibility when working a day shift is essential, since emergent procedures, surprise admissions, diagnostic testing, and even visiting families can interrupt the nurses' plans for the day.

Nurses in our interview stated that they spend their day shifts:

- Administering medications
- Assessing patients
- Coordinating care teams
- Answering patient and family questions
- Performing or assisting with procedures
- Helping patients recover after surgery
- Ensuring that their patients' basic care needs are met



The Good, the Bad, and *the Ugly*



The day shift is undeniably the most fast-paced of all shifts. Nurses often love the fast pace of the day shift and enjoy the feeling of accomplishment they get at the end of the day.

In addition to enjoying staying busy, day shift nurses love being able to keep a regular schedule and spend time with their families in the evening. Most feel healthier and happier when they are able to keep a good sleep schedule.

While most day shift nurses enjoy their work hours, many nurses state that they feel exhausted toward the end of the day and that they come home feeling completely drained. These nurses state that it is challenging to manage high patient turnover and admissions, deal with family inquiries, coordinate care between multiple departments, and deal with management.

Nurses in our interview stated that they spend their day shifts:



Top 10 Tips for Surviving the Day Shift

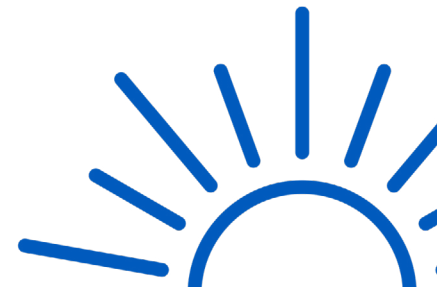


Many of the nurses in our survey joked that they could get through any shift with a pair of “good shoes and a sense of humor.” While this may be true for some, there are a few other things that new nurses should remember to prepare for a busy day shift.

HERE ARE OUR TOP 10 TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE DAY SHIFT

- 01 Arrive a few minutes early to review patient charts and plan your day.
- 02 Prioritize tasks based on patient needs and urgency.
- 03 Maintain clear and open communication with the healthcare team. Plan your day.
- 04 Take short breaks to prevent burnout.
- 05 Stay organized with a handy checklist.
- 06 Dress for success with comfortable shoes and compression socks.
- 07 Keep hydrated and pack healthy snacks for energy.
- 08 Document patient care promptly to stay on top of your workload.
- 09 Adapt and learn from every shift to improve practice.
- 10 Practice self-care after work to recharge.

Pack Your Survival Kit!



Day shift nurses often mention that they barely have time to use the restroom, let alone sit down and eat a meal during the day. While most healthcare facilities make an effort to provide their staff with adequate breaks, many nurses state that they are busy from the time they walk onto the unit to the time they leave for the day. When asked what they normally bring for lunch, one nurse wrote, "I never have time for lunch!"

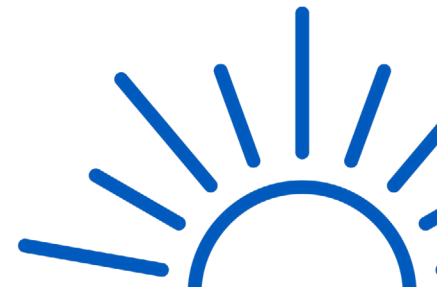
Nurses in our survey said that they do their best to pack lunches and snacks that do not need any extra preparation time and can be eaten quickly in an emergency. Most make an effort to bring high-protein meals that will keep them energized throughout their shift.

Favorite lunches and snacks for day-shift nurses include:

- Yogurt with fruit
- Protein shakes and bars
- Sandwiches
- Leftovers from the night before
- Salads from home
- Nuts and seeds



Pack Your Survival Kit!



In addition to packing healthy and easy-to-prepare foods, day shift nurses said that they try to keep their water bottle with them, always have a pen available, and keep a small treat nearby for an afternoon pick-me-up.

Other tools that help nurses through their day shift include:

- Sticky notes
- Cheat sheets for medications or lab results
- Hair clips or hair elastics
- Compression socks
- Lip balm
- Scissors

Besides bringing physical supplies to work, many nurses in our survey mentioned that they never leave home without a good attitude and a sense of humor. While nursing is one of the most rewarding careers, it can be emotionally exhausting. Being able to laugh with co-workers in the face of challenges is one of the best ways to keep going through the most challenging days.



Chapter 2:

The Evening Shift



While most hospitals and healthcare facilities split up their scheduling into day shift and night shift, there are still many nurses who work the evening shift. Evening shifts typically span the hours of 3 pm to 11 pm.

Nurses working evening shifts may find that they get to experience the best and worst parts of working both day and night shifts. Nurses working the evening shift face unique challenges. Often, they have to finish up things that were missed during the day shift while trying to provide peace and quiet for their patients around bedtime. Evening nurses have the opportunity to collaborate with other care teams and then take time before the patient goes to sleep, answering questions and offering emotional support.



The Good, the Bad, and *the Ugly*



The evening shift is a favorite of nurses who want to spend their morning hours relaxing, doing chores around the house, or pursuing their hobbies. Evenings allow nurses to enjoy the learning opportunities that are available on the day shift, as well as having a little more “downtime” during the later hours of the shift.

Because families cannot stop living their lives while their loved ones are in the hospital, most visitors come to the hospital during the evening shift. While this gives caregivers the opportunity to educate families, ask questions about medical histories, and make good plans for discharging the patient, it also adds some stress and can add to the workload of the evening nurses.

Evening nurses often feel like they are expected to do as much or more than the day shift nurses, with fewer staff and resources. Many evening nurses complain about being short-staffed and having to catch up on things that were not completed during the day, such as finishing up diagnostic tests or discharging patients.

Patients can feel like their daytime nurse is too busy to answer their questions, and many save them until it is time to wind down for the night. Nurses working the evening shift may get the most face-to-face time with the patients, allowing them to educate, provide emotional support, and answer questions.

Here’s what some nurses had to say about working the evening shift



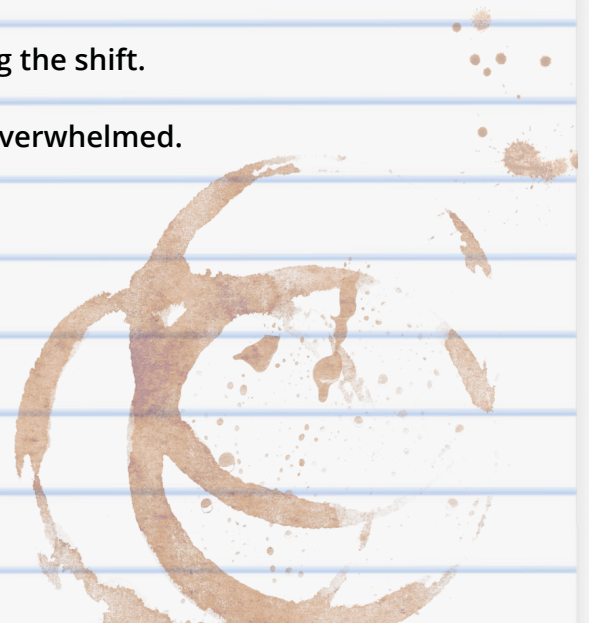
Top 10 Tips for Surviving the Evening Shift



Evening shift nurses tend to hit the ground running at the beginning of their shift, then wind down in the later hours. This rapid change in pace can be difficult for some newer nurses. Being able to jump into a busy part of the day and then stay focused as the night winds down is a learned skill.

HERE ARE OUR TOP 10 TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE EVENING SHIFT

- 01 Use a premade report sheet to stay organized.
- 02 Maintain effective communication during handovers with the day team.
- 03 Take regular breaks to stay sharp and alert.
- 04 Hydrate and snack to keep energy levels up.
- 05 Wear professional yet comfortable gear like compression socks.
- 06 Document care promptly to avoid information gaps.
- 07 Foster teamwork to balance shared responsibilities.
- 08 Find moments of positivity and humor during the shift.
- 09 Manage one task at a time to avoid getting overwhelmed.
- 10 Engage in reflective self-care post-shift.



Alex F.



Antonia S.



Melinda G.



Stephanie C.



Jamie M.



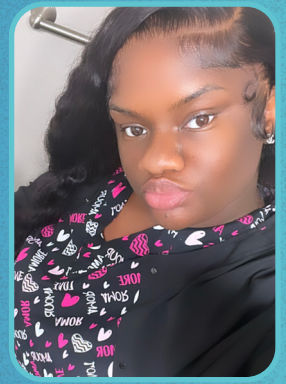
Maci F.



Robert R.



Charlea M.



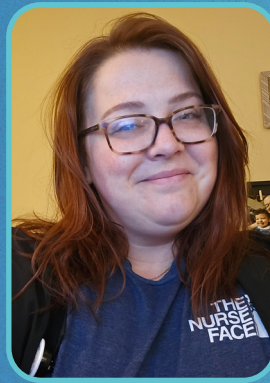
Jacqueline M.



Deborah H.



Tristen B.



Tanya B.



Cheryl R.



Elite Learning Nurses Yearbook of '25

Elite is the proud CE provider
of these REAL nurses making
a REAL impact!

Marvin D.



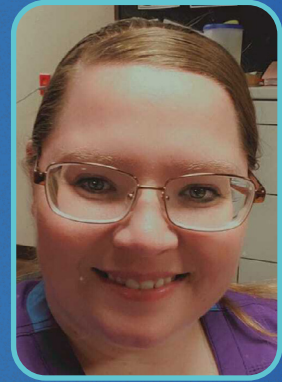
Brooklyn R.



Kiesha H.



Ashley R.



Colette H.



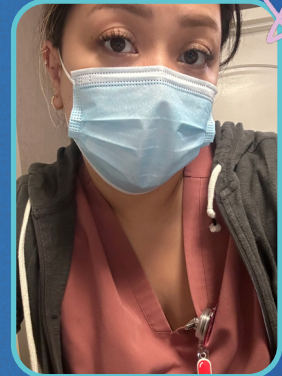
Megan L.



Kimberly J.



Renejane D.



Rewa Z.



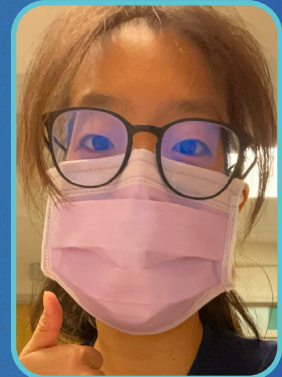
Wilmaries M.



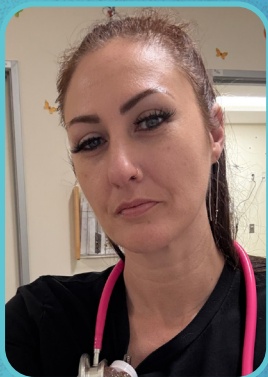
Helen M.



Victoria C.



April S.



Jenn C.



Sherry S.



Kelly S.



Chapter 3:

The Night Shift



The night shift seems to be the most divisive shift among healthcare workers. Some nurses swear by the night shift, while others vow to never work during the night. Just like any other shift, there are pros and cons to working the night shift. While some nurses find it freeing to be out from under the direct supervision of hospital administration during the night shift, other nurses find they have less resources on hand to manage emergencies. Similarly, night nurses have fewer visitors during their shift, meaning that there are fewer interruptions, but less support for patients who need it.

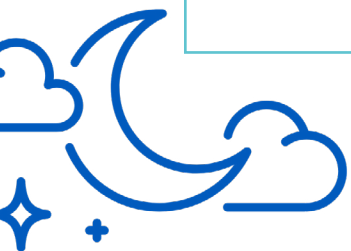
Each night shift nurse has their own routine to maintain their health and sanity while working nights. Some stay on a night schedule even on their days off, while others flip back and forth. Some nurses try to stay up later in the days leading up to their shift to transition slowly, while others jump right in and are up for 24 hours on their first night on.

There is no question that staying up all night and sleeping during the day is a challenge for most night shift workers. However, the pay differential, slower pace, and lack of hospital administrators present at night are enough to draw many nurses to the undesirable hours.

Introduction to the Night Shift

Nurses working the night shift often work 7 pm to 7 am, or 11 pm to 7 am. They usually start their shift by assessing their patients, passing medications, and tying up any loose ends that weren't completed during the day.

Night shift nurses typically have more time to spend with their patients. Instead of collaborating with teams and trying to make time for each department to have a turn with their patient, night nurses can take the time to build real relationships with their patients and bring “humanness” back into nursing care.



The Good, the Bad, and *the Ugly*



Night shift nurses often joke that they are a special kind of crazy. There's a special camaraderie that happens during the night shift, and many night shift nurses form close friend groups. Many talk and share stories to help stay awake during the dreaded 3am hour. Many nurses love that they can get away with keeping snacks out on their desk and wearing their non-approved sweater during their shift, all while working a job that they love.

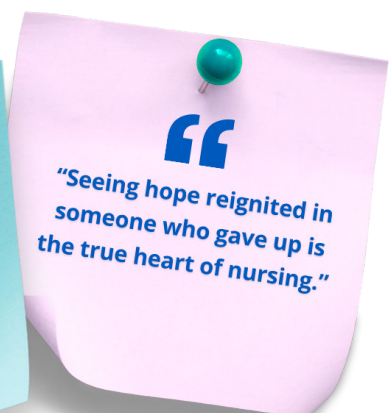
Many night shift nurses enjoy the slower pace of nights. A common joke among nurses is that many things are a "day shift opportunity," as many diagnostic tests, care coordinating meetings, phone calls, and patient care tasks simply cannot be taken care of at night. Avoiding these tasks gives nurses more time to spend with their patients and catch up on paperwork.

The most common complaint about working nights is the challenge of staying healthy while working nights. As one nurse in our survey put it, "The hours are hard on the body."

It is true that staying up all night is a challenge for most people. Every night shift worker has had at least one experience where the neighbor starts mowing their lawn at 11am, making it impossible to fall back asleep. Reversing sleeping and mealtimes, managing daytime sleep, and generally feeling jet-lagged all of the time are challenges that make this shift unmanageable for many people.

Another difficulty discussed frequently during the night shift is the lack of emergency help and resources available. Depending on the hospital unit or clinic, some nurses have to manage emergency situations alone or wait until morning to address a concern they have with a patient. During the night, it can feel impossible to get hold of services like physical therapy, social work, and even physicians.

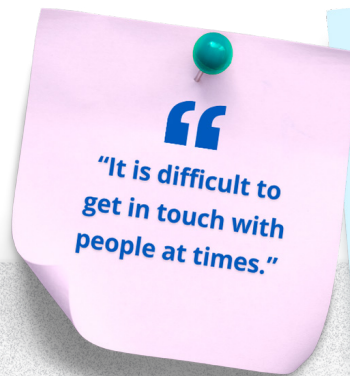
Here's what some nurses had to say about working the night shift:



Top 10 Tips for Surviving the Night Shift



“Surviving” is the way that many people describe getting through night shifts. Staying awake and being on an opposite sleep schedule can be rough, but with a good strategy and a little adjustment period, you may find that you actually enjoy working the night shift.



HERE ARE OUR TOP 10 TIP FOR SURVIVING THE NIGHT SHIFT

- 01 Stick to a consistent sleep schedule for better rest.
- 02 Create a sleep-friendly environment with blackout curtains and white noise.
- 03 Keep hydrated and pack nourishing snacks for sustained energy.
- 04 Take short mental breaks to stay alert.
- 05 Invest in durable, comfortable shoes for long hours.
- 06 Document patient progress promptly for accurate records.
- 07 Engage in quiet learning opportunities like reading healthcare updates.
- 08 Reassess and adjust to patient needs efficiently.
- 09 Stay positive and focus on the impact of your care.
- 10 Don't neglect self-care during off-hours to recover fully.

Pack Your Survival Kit!



People working night shift have a wide variety of preferences and strategies to get through the night shift. However, our survey revealed that a night shift kit should include:

- Snacks
- Lots of water
- Caffeine
- Sweater or jacket
- Penlight
- Books
- Music, if it is allowed on your unit
- Chewing gum or mints
- Eye drops

Nurses said that minty flavors, hard candies, and citrus fruits help them stay awake during their shift. Bringing a book or chatting with a friend during the slow hours can also help you stay awake.



Chapter 4:

Mixed Rotations



Mixed rotations are the least favorite of most nurses. Having to switch back and forth between days, evenings, and nights can be especially challenging. Rotating from a night shift to a day shift with less than 24 hours in between has brought more than one nurse to tears.

However, some nurses find that they enjoy mixed rotations. A good rotation setup allows nurses to have the learning opportunities available during the day and the extra time for patient care at night.

This chapter focuses on strategies to make rotating between shifts more manageable, keep yourself healthy, and maintaining a good work life balance while working rotating shifts.



Introduction to Mixed Rotations

Working a mixture of shifts means being adaptable. Nurses who have a rotating schedule have to handle the demanding day shift hours, as well as being able to work with fewer resources at night. Many hospitals require nurses to orient to both day and night shifts to build up their skill sets.

The Good, the Bad, and *the Ugly*



The biggest challenge when working mixed rotations is the disruption in circadian rhythms and unpredictability in scheduling. Nurses tend to do much better when their shifts are clumped together, i.e., working a few weeks of day shift and then a few weeks of night shift. Most have an easier time with quick switches from days to nights than from nights to days. Nurses who love working mixed rotations state they like the variety of experiences they get.

Here's what some nurses had to say about working mixed rotations:

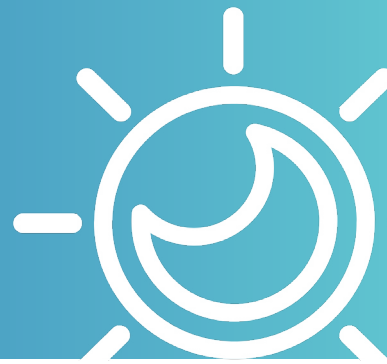
“

“Drink coffee and make sure to have good meals to support your body. Before coming to work, have a good night (or day's) rest.”

“

“I adjust my focus daily. Whether it's a busy case on the day shift or quiet moments of patient care at night, every shift matters.”

Top 10 Tips for Surviving Mixed Rotations



Organization and structure are the keys to success for surviving mixed rotations. Here are our top 10 tips for keeping it together on this type of schedule.

HERE ARE OUR TOP 10 TIP FOR SURVIVING THE MIXED ROTATIONS

- 01 Use a planner to track and prepare for shifts in advance.
- 02 Get into the habit of batch-preparing meals to fuel your day.
- 03 Establish small rituals for unwinding post-shift.
- 04 Stay active and exercise regularly for better stamina.
- 05 Hydrate and eat nourishing foods to maintain energy levels.
- 06 Stay connected with loved ones despite an irregular schedule.
- 07 Celebrate small wins to stay motivated.
- 08 Listen to your body and prioritize rest when needed.
- 09 Practice mindfulness or meditation to manage stress.
- 10 Seek peer support to exchange tips and share experiences.

Pack Your Survival Kit!



Shifting back and forth between days and nights can be overwhelming and disorienting. Having a bag with the essentials for each shift can help make the transitions easier.

We recommend having:

- Extra pens
- A notebook
- Healthy snacks
- A few sugary treats
- A good water bottle
- A sturdy and comfortable pair of shoes
- Lip balm
- A penlight
- Compression socks
- Hand lotion
- A good scrub jacket



Chapter 5:

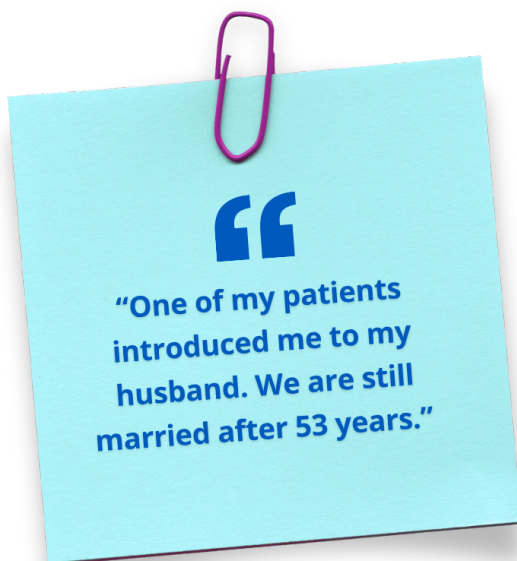
Memorable Tales from the Bedside



No matter what shift you work, you can find things to love about being a nurse. Here are some of our favorite stories from nurses working at the bedside:

“When I was working in the newborn nursery overnight, I was frequently waking up the mom to feed her baby. My favorite times were when the baby finally latched onto the breast after so many tries! Breastfeeding can be so difficult for some, and I wanted the moms to get as much practice with us nurses while in the hospital. It gave the exhausted mom a sense of accomplishment. They were excited to go home because they had the tools to feed their baby effectively. I do miss that!”

“I cared for a young girl who was a victim of a crime, and I watched as she recovered from a coma and reunited with distant relatives. I recalled how hard our hospital social worker tried for several weeks to find family members to help her recover from her injuries. I will never forget how important other healthcare workers were in her recovery.”



“Recently, a patient wrote me a beautiful letter about how I helped her during her time on our unit. It helps to reread it on difficult days and is so heartwarming and meaningful. It makes me remember why I love what I do!”



“I worked in a sheltered workshop for developmentally disabled clients. The client had symptoms of a urinary tract infection. We could not get her to urinate into a pan on the toilet. The family doctor said to take her to urgent care for catheterization. I was up by the client's head while the procedure was done. Our client kicked the pan of urine, and it went on my head and my clothes.”

“Working on a med-surg floor and a very obese patient sitting on toilet started to scream. I ran in to catch the baby boy before he hit the toilet. Won't ever forget that one!”

Chapter 5:

Memorable Tales from the Bedside



“A patient and his wife were scared about his diagnosis, as he would need to be transferred to the hospital for further testing. I gave them emotional support and explained everything that would happen once the EMTs arrived. A few weeks later, they returned for an appointment and each time he came back, he looked better and better. The patient and his wife were so grateful to the medical staff for everything that was done to help him. But the best part of it all was seeing him smiling with his wife and knowing he gets another day to enjoy his life with her.”



“When working evenings, I took linens and formed them into the shape of a person in the bed of a discharged patient. Night nurse saw 'body' in the bed and wondered why no meds were in the med cart for that patient.”

“While providing yearly flu shots, it was like a drive-thru. An older man asked me how long I have been giving shots, and I said, ‘Oh, since 8 this morning.’ His eyes widened, and he said, ‘Then I want someone else.’ It dawned on me then, he meant how long had I been a nurse, not how long had I been giving shots that day!”



“My favorite story was the time when a patient couldn't dry her hair. I had downtime to dry her hair for her. I felt like I wasn't at work for a few minutes. It was a good shift that day overall.”

“Delivered twin boys six weeks early in the prison with no doctor available. Only me and an LPN. We ran out of hands! Thank God I was a maternity nurse straight out of nursing school. They were both 3 pounds each and only spent 9 days in the NICU.”

“Gross but here goes: Patient with end-stage liver cirrhosis had an ammonia level of 500 $\mu\text{mol/L}$, somnolent. The doctor ordered lactulose enemas every 15 minutes in an attempt to bring the ammonia level down. (Should have been ICU because of the amount of time required, but DNR, so no ICU.) My charge agreed to pass morning medications while I did enemas. I truly didn't believe it would help. He awakened at 11. His family of 6 kids, their spouses, grandkids, and wife arrived early afternoon. They watched the Spartans win a March Madness game (the patient put each child through MSU, even though he personally never attended). They had a beautiful time together. He died the next day, but they all had that precious memory. I was glad we did all those enemas.”

About Elite Learning

For over 20 years, Elite Learning has been dedicated to providing licensed professionals from around the nation with the highest quality continuing education and professional development courses that not only meet their state mandated requirements, but also empower them with the knowledge they need to achieve more in their careers.

Elite Learning

26 N. Beach St., Suite A
Ormond Beach, FL 32174

1-888-857-6920

Hours: Mon-Fri | 9am-6pm ET; Sat | 10am-4pm ET

Elite Learning Copyright Policy

All rights reserved. Materials may not be reproduced without the expressed written permission or consent of Elite Professional Education, LLC. The materials presented in our courses are meant to provide the consumer with general information on the topics covered. The information provided was prepared by professionals with practical knowledge in the areas covered. It is not meant to provide medical, legal or professional advice. Elite Professional Education, LLC recommends that you consult a medical, legal or professional services expert licensed in your state.

Elite Professional Education, LLC has made all reasonable efforts to ensure that all content provided in our courses are accurate and up to date at the time of printing or publishing, but does not represent or warrant that it will apply to your situation or circumstances and assumes no liability from reliance on these materials.