



## **Workplace Nutrition: Eating well during your shift**

Healthcare is one of the largest employers according to Statistics Canada, employing approximately 1.9 million people.

Working 9am to 5pm may be considered stereotypical working hours although, currently in Canada 3 in 10 citizens work shifts outside of these hours. When looking at employees in healthcare (including first responders) they are often needed 24/7, resulting in long work shifts throughout the day and night.

Research states working shifts outside the hours of 7am to 6pm may have negative impacts on many parts of your daily living such as:

- **Social Interaction:** shift work commonly includes working weekends and weeknights making it more difficult to plan social gatherings and spend time with family
- **Physical Activity:** increased difficulty to keep a regular exercise schedule while working long and irregular shifts, the opportunities to exercise are often at unconventional times
- **Sleep Schedule:** disturbed by difficult sleep environments, inconsistency due to irregular work schedule, high caffeine use can cause problems
- **Nutrition:** meals are missed due to fast-paced work environment, digestion is slow and inefficient during the night, snacks tend to be less nutritious (cafe/restaurants are closed, only vending machines are available)

Over time, the above impacts can cause serious, long term effects on your overall health such as an increase in BMI, waist circumference, blood pressure, and LDL cholesterol, all of which

can contribute to the development of chronic diseases. Maintaining a healthy weight and active lifestyle will decrease your risk of serious health complications in your future.

## **Being a nutritious, night shift worker**

Nutrition is one aspect that can be individualized to your daily schedule with effective planning and determination. Improving your diet will positively influence your sleep schedule and give you more energy to participate in physical activities. A nutritious diet will also allow for healthy weight management. This will help increase your work performance, energy levels and aid in mood stabilization.

### **Before the shift..**

Plan Ahead.

- Planning ahead will prevent you from spending extra money on fast-food, vending machines and coffee shops.
- Packing a lunch ensures you will always have healthy meals and snacks available throughout the duration of your shift. The more food you bring to work, the less likely you will purchase unhealthy snacks.

Pack a variety of light meals and snacks composed of mostly protein and complex carbohydrates. These will keep you full longer, curb cravings and give you energy.

- Cheese, Deli Meat and Whole Grain Crackers
- Trail Mix and an Apple
- Greek Yogurt with Fresh Fruit and Whole Grain Granola
- Hummus and Vegetables
- Spinach Salad with Goat Cheese, Berries and Chicken
- Cottage Cheese with Tomato Slices
- Cucumber Slices topped with Salmon and Cream Cheese
- Hard Boiled Egg with a Whole Grain English Muffin
- Boiled and Salted Edamame Pods
- Chia Pudding with Fresh Fruit
- Brown Rice Cakes topped with Peanut Butter and Banana
- Homemade Energy Balls/Protein Bars
- Whole Grain Toast topped with Cream Cheese, Avocado and Tomato

Eat your largest meal now.

- Consuming large meals during the night can cause stomach upset, heartburn, gas and make you feel tired.
- Small meals and snacks put less stress on your gastrointestinal tract during digestion which will prevent any gastrointestinal discomfort.

Bring a reusable water bottle.

### **During your shift..**

#### Stay hydrated.

- Always have a full, easy drinking, reusable water bottle by your side.
- Choose water over sugary drinks and caffeine. These will cause a spike in your energy for a short period of time then you'll experience fatigue.
- Staying hydrated will maintain healthy bowel function, circulation and nutrient transport. It will keep you awake and alert during the shift.

#### Avoid spicy, deep fried, fatty foods during the shift.

- These can cause stomach upset, indigestion and fatigue.
- If these foods are ate near the end of your shift, you may have difficulties falling asleep as they require intensive digestion.

#### Avoid sweet snacks.

- They will cause a spike in your blood sugar, will not keep you full and will result in cravings.

#### Limit caffeine.

- Only consume in the first half of your shift.
- Drinking caffeine near the end of your shift will make it difficult for you to obtain adequate, quality sleep.

Relax when eating, give your body time to digest in a low stress environment.

Eat with others whenever possible.

#### Don't skip meals.

- When you skip meals, the likelihood of overeating at your next meal and having cravings for unhealthy foods is heightened.
- Skipping meals makes your body less efficient at utilizing its energy stores. Your concentration will diminish, you'll become fatigued and irritable.
- Schedule meal and snack breaks throughout your shift.
- By packing small, quick to eat snacks you will be able to take short breaks to eat.

#### Remain active throughout your shift.

- Take the stairs, have a stretch breaks or go for a walk. Being physically active will increase your mood and sleep quality.

#### **After your shift..**

Have a small meal before bed to preventing hunger sensations from waking you prematurely.

Limit alcohol intake after shift as it can interfere with your sleep quality.

Healthy changes to your diet will increase your energy levels, job performance, sleep and lifelong overall health. Only make a few changes to your diet at a time, any healthy change will make a difference. Making small changes over a longer period of time will ensure new, healthy habits are formed and manageable. Never take the fun out of your food!

## **Additional Resources**

[Unlockfood.ca - Nutrition Tips for Shift Workers](#)

[Dietitians of Canada - 10 Nutrition Tips for Shift Workers](#)

[Statistics Canada - Work-life balance of shift workers](#)

[Government of Canada - Rotational Shiftwork](#)

[Queensland University - Shifting Nutrition](#)

[Oxford County - Are there special nutrition considerations for shift workers?](#)

[CBC Radio - Read this if you do shift work](#)

[Nutrition Tips for Nurses who Work Shifts](#)

[The Impact of Shift Work on People's Daily Health Habits and Adverse Health Outcomes](#)

## **Recipes**

[Unlockfood.ca - Healthy Lunches & Snacks for Work](#)

[Peanut Butter Energy Bites](#)

[Protein Snack Pack](#)

[Healthy Rice Cake Toppings](#)

[Chia Pudding](#)

[Yogurt Parfaits](#)

[Avocado Toast](#)

[Shrimp Spring Rolls](#)

[Chicken Hummus Lunch Meal Prep](#)

[Cobb Salad](#)

[Turkey Spinach Pinwheels](#)