

Nutrition for Shift Work

Shift work can disrupt your body clock and normal eating habits. Because of this, it is important for shift workers to learn how to properly fuel their bodies while working overnights or long shifts. A healthy diet is essential for overall health and for preventing chronic disease. Focusing on a balanced diet can increase your energy levels for your shift and other daily tasks.

Follow this PDF guide for some basic tips on how to optimize your nutrition as a shift worker.



SHIFT WORK OVERVIEW

- Your body works on a built-in clock called your circadian rhythm. This internal clock helps to regulate your hormones, digestion, mood, and other bodily functions. It plans for you to be asleep during nighttime and awake during the day.
- When you work night shifts, you are likely doing the opposite. So your circadian rhythm gets thrown off! Because of this, it is crucial for your health to understand how you can alter your habits to better support your built-in clock.
- Shift workers are more likely to experience disturbances in sleep, mood changes, fatigue, and other health problems. They are even at an increased risk for chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes.
- Healthy eating habits before, during, and after your shift can support your circadian rhythm and minimize any adverse health effects from shift work.

MEAL TIMING

- One of the biggest challenges with shift work is meal timing. Shift workers aren't able to eat meals at "regular" intervals that your body is used to.
- Here is a basic overview of preferred meal timing for shift work:

BEFORE SHIFT

- Eat right when you wake up/before your shift in the PM (likely around dinnertime)

DURING SHIFT

- Have your second meal of the day during your shift, as well as a few snacks

AFTER SHIFT

- Have a meal right after your shift in the AM, typically around breakfast time



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BALANCING MEALS + SNACKS

MEALS/SNACKS:

✓ PROTEIN
SOURCE

+

✓ CARB
SOURCE

- Creating balanced meals and snacks is an important aspect of shift work nutrition (and a healthy diet in general!).
- When planning out your meals, aim to pair a protein with a carb at each meal/snack.
- Aim for at least ~20 g/protein for meals and ~10 g/protein for snacks.
- Especially when eating during your shift, protein-rich meals will make you feel less tired and will help better support your internal clock.

PLANNING AHEAD

- You will want to plan ahead for your meals as much as you can, especially during work. Organization is key for eating well during your shift.
- Tips for planning ahead:
 - At the beginning of the week do a rough inventory of what you have on hand and will need throughout the week for your meals. You don't want to be left with no options!
 - Consider if you will have access to a microwave, fridge, etc. during your shift.
 - Keep your pantry full of easy-to-grab snack options (see ideas on the last page).
 - When cooking, make a double-batch so you have a meal ready right before or after your next shift.
 - Don't dismiss frozen and canned options (TV dinners, burritos, canned veg and fruit, etc). They can be very helpful when you are low energy or running late. Try to look for options that are low in sodium, added sugars, and saturated fats.

PORTIONING SNACKS

- Portioning out your snacks ahead of time can be a game-changer. It makes sure you don't accidentally overeat and helps you stay prepared.
- Tips for portioning snacks:
 - Have zip-lock baggies on hand in various sizes. Pre-portion your trail mix, pretzels, crackers, etc. into the baggies and leave them in your pantry.
 - Small reusable meal prep containers with multiple compartments can be great for larger or combined snacks.



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HYDRATION

- Adequate hydration is extremely important for your overall health and wellness. It is recommended to drink at least 64 oz of water/day. Your needs may increase if you have a physically-demanding job, as many shift workers do.
- Tips for increasing hydration:
 - Bring a reusable water bottle with you to refill during your shifts. If you don't have anywhere to refill, bring 2-3 waters with you.
 - Electrolyte mixes (such as Liquid IV) can be added to your water and may be helpful to replace any electrolytes lost during your shift.
 - Carry other beverages you like with you besides water, especially for your meal and snack times.



CAFFEINE INTAKE

- Caffeine can be used to increase alertness and concentration while on the job.
- However, caffeine intake can impact your sleep cycle and reduce your length and quality of sleep. This can leave you feeling even more tired the next day and disrupt your circadian rhythm further!
- To combat this, it is recommended to limit your caffeine intake as your shift goes on and you get closer to your main sleep window.
- Caffeine can dehydrate you so drink 1 glass of water extra for every 1 caffeinated drink.
- Best practice: drink caffeinated beverages during the first few hours of your shift and then switch to water or other decaf beverages.

BEVERAGE IDEAS



DECAF

- Flavored water
- Sparkling water
- Electrolyte drinks
- Decaf tea
- Lemonade

CAFFEINATED

- Coffee
- Green tea/matcha
- Iced tea
- Energy drinks
- Energy shots



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IDEAS FOR ON-THE-GO MEALS

PROTEIN

- Pre-cooked meats
 - Ground chicken, turkey, beef
- Canned fish
 - Tuna, salmon
- Deli meat + cheese slices
- Microwavable grilled chicken strips
- Pre-cooked eggs
 - Microwavable egg cups
 - Egg bites
- Black bean or chicken burgers

+

CARB

- Microwavable rice packets
 - Brown, white
- Steamable vegetables
- Slices of whole grain bread
- Whole grain wraps
- Flatbread/pita bread
- Microwavable oatmeal
- Whole grain bagel
- Pre-cooked pasta
- Whole grain bun
 - Sweet potato, regular

IDEAS FOR ON-THE-GO SNACKS

PROTEIN

- Jerky
- Cottage cheese
- String cheese
- Mixed nuts
- Nut butter packs
- Hard boiled eggs
- Trail mix
- Greek yogurt
- Cubed cheese
- Edamame
- Protein bars/powder
- Protein shakes

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CARB

- Crackers
- Pretzels
- Granola bars
- Vegetable sticks
- Whole fruits
- Dried fruit/fruit leathers
- Oatmeal packets
- Rice cakes
- Applesauce packs
- Sunflower seeds
- Energy bites/balls
- Baked/vegetable chips

