

Nutrition Tips for Shift Workers

Working shifts can upset your body's "internal clock" and overall health. When you work shifts, you may find it hard to know when and what to eat so here are 10 nutrition tips for shift workers.

Eat your main meal early if on a later shift. If possible, eat your main meal before you go to work and have a small meal and healthy snacks during your shift. Eating large meals at night can cause heartburn, gas, or constipation. It can also make you feel sleepy and sluggish.

Preparation is key. Eat more protein and lower glycemic carbohydrates. Not surprisingly, night shift workers often struggle with feelings of drowsiness. Protein foods like tuna, eggs, lean chicken, roast beef, baked beans, split pea soups, soy nuts, low fat cheese strings, cottage cheese, and peanut butter increase alertness. High glycemic carbohydrate foods like bread, potatoes, and cereal have a sedating effect.

Avoid fatty, fried or spicy foods. Foods such as hamburgers, fried chicken and spicy chili may lead to heartburn and indigestion.

Avoid high glycemic carbohydrates such as cookies, candies, snack foods, sugary sweets and sweetened beverages. Too much sugar isn't good for anybody and it may be even more damaging for night shift workers. These foods spike blood sugars then cause a crash which hampers alertness and mood.

Take your time eating. Don't rush when you eat. You deserve your break, so enjoy every single bite of your meals and snack! If possible, eat with others.

Stay well hydrated. Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. It can help you to stay alert during your shift. Keep a water bottle nearby and take sips even before you feel thirsty. Low fat milk, tea, unsweetened herbal tea, and lower sodium 100% vegetable juices are examples of nutritious beverages.

Watch the caffeine. Drinking coffee, tea or other caffeinated beverages can help you stay alert but don't consume more than 400 mg of caffeine a day (the amount of caffeine in two cups of regular coffee). Caffeine can stay in your system for up to eight hours which can affect your sleep. Switch to decaffeinated, herbal tea or water about four hours before bedtime.

Avoid drinking alcohol after work. A drink may make you feel more relaxed, but alcohol can disturb your sleep.

Choose healthier snacks. Night shift workers often find themselves snacking to "keep their energy up", and this can lead to empty calories that contribute to weight gain. Raw vegetables like baby carrots, radishes, celery, and snow peas are a great way to satisfy the urge to snack; they are low in calories and high in nutrients and fibre.

Stay at a healthy body weight. Healthy eating and active living play a big role in helping you reach and maintain a healthy weight. A healthy body weight will lower your chances of getting heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer.

For more tips check out: www.nutritionmonth.ca