

Nutrition Tips for Shift Work

- ✓ Not sure when to eat your main meal? Consider when your body and brain are the most active. This is when good nourishment is crucial and will help assure you maintain high energy levels, alertness and focus when you need it most. For the majority of people, this will be the first meal they eat after waking up. If you are not accustomed to eating a larger meal as your first meal, this may be a gradual process that starts with a small snack. Your body will eventually adjust as you increase your intake. Remember, you do not need to eat “breakfast” food for your first meal. It can be any combination of healthy fat, protein and carbohydrate that appeals to you.
- ✓ Try to eat something within an hour after waking up, and then not let more than 5 hours pass without eating again. If you tend to eat small meals/ snacks as opposed to full meals, try to eat every 3 hours.
- ✓ Since digesting a large meal close to bedtime can negatively affect sleep, it’s usually not a good idea to eat your largest meal as your last meal of the day. Your food intake should taper down as you get closer to bedtime and are less active. This can also help with weight management.
- ✓ Regular cardiovascular exercise and strength training can have a multitude of benefits. However, if you find yourself in the position of working 12 hour days with very little time off, then sleep, nutrition and family time become the priority. You may find that you can get some exercise in on your days off, or exercise in 10 minute chunks of time. If you can make family time active, fantastic!



- ✓ Caffeine can stay in your system for up to 8 hours and can be very disruptive to sleep. If you must, have your caffeine within the first 4 hours after waking up for the day and then cut it off!
- ✓ Understand that sweetened soda, sports and energy drinks can give you a temporary energy burst, but the long term impact on your energy levels is negative. They can also make it very difficult to lose weight if you have this goal.
- ✓ Even mild dehydration can zap your energy levels. Keep well hydrated with unsweetened beverages (like water and unsweetened tea). Fluid needs vary depending on body weight and temperature, but you definitely need extra when hot and sweating.
- ✓ Consider “batch cooking” when you do have time off to stock up for when you are working. It’s great to have a plan at least a week in advance for what you will be eating at work and home for the following week.
- ✓ The best foods for energy, focus, weight management and digestion are lower in fat and simple sugars, and include: whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein sources and low-fat dairy products. See the reverse side for some quick and healthy meal and snack ideas.



Quick and Healthy Meal and Snack Ideas

- Oatmeal with healthy “add-ins”. These can include nuts or seeds and fruit, which can be fresh, dried, canned, or frozen. Apples, walnuts and cinnamon make a great combination.
- Trail mix made with your favorite nuts or seeds, dried fruit and whole grain cereal (make your own!).
- Peanut butter and jelly on whole grain bread.
- Smoothie with frozen fruit, low-fat yogurt, and low-fat milk.
- Omelet with low-fat cheese, tomatoes and onions (or favorite veggies).
- Low-fat yogurt layered with your favorite whole grain cereal and fruit.
- Whole grain waffle topped with low-fat yogurt and fruit.
- Lean turkey and low-fat cheese in a whole grain pita, tortilla wrap or English muffin. Add your favorite veggies.



- Whole grain English muffin half toasted then topped with pizza or tomato sauce, low-fat cheese, and any favorite veggies and/ or lean meats. Microwave a few seconds to melt the cheese.
- Chicken and vegetables: mix pulled rotisserie chicken with microwavable brown rice and your favorite cooked frozen or canned veggies.
- Mix pulled rotisserie chicken or canned beans into canned, lower sodium soup to boost the protein content.
- Canned turkey or vegetarian chili.

- Low-fat cottage cheese, low-fat ricotta cheese, or low-fat yogurt mixed with unsweetened fruit or fruit puree.
- Whole grain crackers with peanut butter or low-fat cheese.
- Whole grain pretzels dipped in peanut butter.
- Low-fat string cheese and fresh fruit.
- Apple or banana dipped in peanut butter or low-fat yogurt.
- Fresh veggies dipped in hummus, low-fat ricotta or low-fat cottage cheese.
- Canned tuna and low fat mayo on whole grain bread or crackers.



- ✓ Great portable protein rich snacks include: hard boiled eggs, nuts, seeds, low-fat string cheese, peanut butter and canned tuna.
- ✓ Energy/ protein/ granola bars can range from very healthy to no better than a candy bar. Try to choose bars with less than 250 calories, at least 3 grams of fiber, and at least 4 grams of protein.