

Shiftwork and Nutrition

Breakfast at Midnight ... Lunch at 4 a.m. ... Supper at 8 a.m. ... Sound Familiar?

If shiftwork disturbs your "normal" eating schedule, as it does for many people, your risk of developing digestive problems or heart disease may increase. What you eat and when you eat it may also affect the quality of your sleep between shifts. Choosing the right balance of foods CAN make a difference.

Preventing Stomach Upset

As a shiftworker, you are four times more likely than a day worker to develop an ulcer or suffer from loss of appetite, diarrhea, or constipation. Some small changes in the food you eat and when you eat it can reduce these risks.



- First, cut back on highly seasoned foods. For some people, spicy meats, sauces, salad dressings, and hot pickles irritate the stomach. Choose fresh unprocessed meats, mild sauces and oil and vinegar dressings.
- Cut back on fried foods and foods high in fat. These are harder to digest.
- Limit caffeine-containing foods and beverages like coffee, cola beverages and chocolate. These foods can cause irritation in the digestive tract.
- Schedule regular meals. Try to eat a minimum of three meals in each 24 hour period. It's a good idea to eat a lunch to break up the shift. This will improve your appetite and keep your bowels regular. As an added bonus, most workers find that they feel better and are able to do more work after eating a lunch.

Keeping Your Heart Healthy

Regular meals which are low in fat and high in fibre will best reduce your risk of heart disease. Take a lunch and don't skip breakfast. Spread butter or margarine on only one side of the sandwich if at all. Meat portions should be small - a piece of meat the size of a deck of cards is really all you need at a meal. Fill up on grain products and try to get lots of fruits and vegetables every day.

Try these ideas for low fat, high fibre lunches:

- Ham and Swiss sandwich on whole grain or rye bread, cucumber slices and 100% juice
- Bagel and low fat cheese (less than 20% M.F.) With tomato slices, chicken soup, baby carrots, and water
- Pita stuffed with veggies, low fat turkey breast slice, mustard or mayo, and milk
- Leftover skinless chicken breast or leg, whole wheat roll, vegetable soup, grapes and milk

I Can't Sleep!

Do you have difficulty sleeping as your shift rotates? Your internal clock or circadian rhythm works against daytime sleeping, but your choice of food can improve the quality of your sleep.

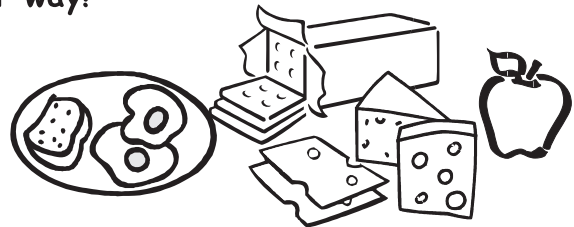
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and greasy foods within five hours of sleep.
- Try a light meal of carbohydrate rich foods like grains, fruits and vegetables, and low fat dairy products before sleep.
- Drink less at the end of your shift for uninterrupted sleep.

I Can't Stay Awake!

Some shiftworkers have no problem sleeping but never quite feel awake either. Protein foods promote alertness and can help you feel more "with it". Combine carbohydrate rich foods with protein rich foods at the beginning of your day or shift to give you the energy you need.

Try these simple wake-up foods to get you on your way!

- Turkey and mustard on a whole wheat bagel
- Eggs and toast
- Peanut/almond butter and banana sandwich
- Cheese and crackers with an apple



Shiftwork does present some road blocks to regular eating and nutrition. With some planning you can lower your risk of health problems. Eat Well, Live Well!

The Bottom Line for Healthy Eating

- Consider having your largest meal in the middle of your awake period or a couple hours before starting your shift.
- Have a light meal in the middle of your shift.
- Avoid too much coffee, tea or other caffeinated beverages especially near the end of your shift.
- Eat balanced and regular meals according to Canada's Food Guide.
- Try to join your family for at least one meal a day, even if it is your "breakfast" and their supper.