

# Nutrition & Shiftwork

Shift workers often experience heartburn, abdominal bloating and pain, flatulence, diarrhea, or constipation because of constantly changing their eating schedules. Part of the reason for the above symptoms is that during the night the gastrointestinal system rests. This means that many digestive processes, such as bowel movements, are decreased compared to during the day.



When working night shift, try eating your first main meal in the late afternoon or early evening rather than in the middle of the night.

## Having trouble staying awake?

To stay alert, include protein foods in meals and snacks during your shift. Protein foods tend to have the opposite effect of carbohydrates,

which can make you sleepy. Protein foods include lean meats, fish, poultry, peanut butter, lower fat cheese, eggs, tofu, and beans. Avoid eating large amounts of protein foods before you go to bed.

## Healthy Eating Tips for Working Shifts

- Establish regular eating times as much as possible. Aim for a minimum of three balanced meals during your waking hours. Snacks are an important part of a healthy eating pattern, especially during long shifts.
- Use Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating to plan meals. Try to include all four food groups at each meal.
- Emphasize high fibre, lower fat food choices, which can help counteract some of the gastrointestinal symptoms mentioned above.

## What to Eat When

Eating during shift work means making some changes in the type of food you eat and the timing of your meals. You may need to try different foods and timing of meals to find out the best alternatives for decreasing stomach problems or fatigue.

When working afternoon and evening shifts, try eating your main meal at midday instead of during the middle of the shift.

A healthy serving size of foods high in protein is:

- 50-100 grams meat, fish, or poultry - about the size of a deck of cards.
- 1/2 -1 cup beans, peas, or lentils
- 1-2 eggs
- 1/3 cup tofu
- 50 grams lower fat cheese

## Need help getting to sleep?

With rotating shifts, people often have trouble sleeping. Our internal clock, or circadian rhythm, works against daytime sleeping. To promote sleep after a shift, enjoy a high carbohydrate meal or snack. Foods high in carbohydrates increase the levels of serotonin, a brain chemical that promotes sleepiness.

High carbohydrate foods include pasta, bagels, breads, cereals, crackers, and fruit. A bowl of cereal with milk and fruit or toast may help you fall asleep more readily at the end of your shift. Avoid eating too many carbohydrate-rich foods during a shift if you are feeling tired.

## Coffee Break!

Caffeine affects people differently. It acts on the brain and may affect co-ordination, concentration, sleep patterns, and behaviour. Avoid caffeine for at least four to five hours before going to bed so it does not interfere with sleep. Recommendations for caffeine consumption are to limit intake to no more than four 6-ounce cups of coffee per day. While it is important to get plenty of fluids during your waking hours, drink less fluid before sleep so it's not interrupted by trips to the bathroom.



## Planning your "Lunch Bag"

Prepare your "lunch bag" meal for your next shift before going to bed to ensure you have a healthy meal to take to work. Ideas for packed meals include a cold chicken leg, whole-wheat roll, vegetable soup, part-skim cheese, and grapes, or ham and cheese on rye, salad, an apple, and milk pudding. Snacks to pack include low fat muffins, cut up vegetables, fruit, low fat yogurt, or trail mix of dried fruit and nuts.

## Sample Meal Plan Using Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating

Food Groups	Examples of Food Choices
<b>Upon Waking</b> 1 serving Vegetables and Fruit 1-2 servings Grain Products 1 serving Milk Products 0-1 serving Meat and Alternatives	<b>Upon Waking</b> ½ cup juice or 1 orange ¾ cup oatmeal, 1 slice toast 1 cup low fat milk 0-1 tablespoon peanut butter
<b>'Lunch' Meal</b> 1 serving Meat and Alternatives 2-4 servings Grain Products 2-3 servings Vegetables and Fruit 1 serving Milk Products	<b>'Lunch' Meal</b> 50-100 grams meat, fish, or poultry 2-4 slices whole wheat bread 1 cup salad, apple, and pear 175 grams yogurt cup
<b>Main Meal</b> 1 serving Meat and Alternatives 2-3 servings Vegetables and Fruit 1 serving Milk Products 1-2 servings Grain Products	<b>Main Meal</b> 1½ cups bean chili 1 cup cooked vegetables 50 grams grated cheese 1-2 dinner rolls
<b>Between Meal Snacks</b> 2-3 servings Grain Products 1-3 servings Vegetables and Fruit 1 serving Milk Products 1 Meat and Alternatives	<b>Between Meal Snacks</b> Bagel, 4-6 crackers Carrot and celery sticks, banana 1 cup low fat chocolate milk 1 hard boiled egg

