

# 10 Nutrition Tips for Shift Workers

Shift work means working outside the usual 7 am to 6 pm time period. Three out of every ten Canadians works shifts. You may work straight nights, straight afternoons, or rotate these different shifts.

Working shifts can upset your body's "internal clock." Your "internal clock" tells your body to be awake during the day and to sleep at night.

When you work shifts, you may find it hard to know when and what to eat. It may also be hard to find enough time to exercise regularly. Maybe you have already experienced some of these common problems:

- a change in your appetite;
- trouble falling asleep or getting a good night's sleep;
- weight loss or weight gain;
- constipation, diarrhea, gas;
- indigestion, heartburn or stomach ulcers; and
- high blood pressure.

The good news is that by eating well and keeping active you can avoid some of these problems. Follow these nutrition tips to stay healthy, alert and feel your best at work and when you are at home.

## Steps you can take

Here are 10 tips for shift workers.

1. Eat your "main meal" before going to work. If you are on the afternoon shift have your main meal at mid-day around noon. If you are on the evening shift, eat your main meal at about 6 pm before you go to work. Have a small meal and healthy snacks during your shift. Eating large meals during the night can cause heartburn, gas, or constipation. It can also make you feel sleepy and sluggish. Be careful not to overeat on the job.
2. Pack your own healthy snacks. It can be difficult to find healthy snacks during the afternoon and night shifts. The cafeteria may be closed. Vending machines may only carry salty or high fat snacks, and high calorie sugary drinks.



Examples of good snacks are an apple with a small piece of low fat cheese or a handful of nuts with low fat yogurt. See more snack ideas in the Healthy Snacks for Adults factsheet in the Additional Resources section below.

3. Avoid fatty, fried or spicy foods. Foods such as hamburgers, fried chicken and spicy chili may lead to heartburn and indigestion. Eating too much fat can also increase your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
4. Avoid sugary foods and drinks. You may feel a quick boost of energy after having a chocolate bar or sugary soft drink. This feeling doesn't last long and you may experience low energy levels later on. Enjoy nutritious snacks and beverages instead to stay alert and keep your energy up.
5. 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 your co-workers for some company.
6. Stay well hydrated. Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. It may help you to stay alert and not feel so tired 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 other nutritious beverages that you can drink. Watch the amount of 100% fruit juice you drink because the calories can add up quickly.
7. Watch the caffeine. Drinking coffee, tea and other caffeinated beverages can help you stay alert. But don't consume more than 400 mg of caffeine a day. That is about the amount of caffeine found in two to three small cups of regular coffee. Caffeine can stay in your system for up to eight hours. This can affect your sleep. Switch to decaffeinated drinks, unsweetened herbal tea or water about four hours before bedtime.



Caffeine Content (per 250 mL cup)	
Coffee	100-170 mg
Decaf Coffee	3-15 mg
Tea	43-80 mg
Herbal Tea	0 mg
Cola (1 can)	380 mg
Energy Drink (1 can)	80-100 mg

8. Avoid alcohol. Avoid drinking alcohol after work and when you get home. A drink may make you feel more relaxed, but alcohol can disturb your sleep.
  
9. Have a light snack before bedtime. It's hard to fall asleep when you're too hungry or too full. If you're still hungry after work eat a small healthy snack before bedtime. Try a bowl of whole grain cereal with milk or a piece of whole grain toast with jam. If you're too full at bedtime try cutting out a snack during your shift.
  
10. Stay at a healthy body weight. Healthy eating and active living play a big role in helping you reach and maintain a healthy weight. When you have a healthy body weight, you'll lower your chances of getting heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer.

**Special Considerations**

Stick to your routine. On your days off try to eat and sleep around the same times that you would if you were working your shift. That way your "internal clock" stays on schedule. Talk to the company's occupational health nurse about the best sleeping schedule for you.

Eat together. Whenever possible, try to eat at least one meal a day with your family. Families who eat together actually eat healthier and more well balanced meals. Mealtimes are a great time to connect with each other too!



Keep active. Good nutrition and fitness go hand in hand. Keep active to:

- improve your mood;
- stay fit;
- manage stress;
- sleep better; and
- re-energize yourself while at work.

Take a stretch break. Walk up a few flights of stairs. Or go for a brisk walk. Keep fit with ideas from Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/04paap-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/04paap-eng.php).

Stay in touch. Working shifts can be stressful on your social and family lives. Keep in touch with your spouse and kids every day. Plan your vacation days in advance to attend family activities and events.

### Additional Resources

- EatRight Ontario, Nutrition Tips for Shift Workers  
[www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Workplace-wellness/Nutrition-Tips-for-Shift-Workers.aspx#.UmfkE5RASb8](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Workplace-wellness/Nutrition-Tips-for-Shift-Workers.aspx#.UmfkE5RASb8)
- EatRight Ontario, Healthy Snacks for Adults  
[www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Weight-Management/Healthy-snack-ideas-for-adults.aspx#.Umfj2JRASb8==](http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Articles/Weight-Management/Healthy-snack-ideas-for-adults.aspx#.Umfj2JRASb8==)
- Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc., Shift Work – Health Effects and Solutions  
[www.nupge.ca/sites/nupge.ca/files/Shiftwork.pdf](http://www.nupge.ca/sites/nupge.ca/files/Shiftwork.pdf)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – for good information and advice about shift work  
[www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/shiftwrk.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/shiftwrk.html)



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