

Shift to Healthy Eating at Work

Did you know that employees spend about 60% of their waking hours at work and eat at least one meal while on shift? This means that making healthy food and drink choices at work can have an impact on health and energy levels.

March is Nutrition Month! Alberta Health Services dietitians are sharing tips on how to *Shift to Healthy Eating at Work*.

Fueling for your Workday

The first meal – Kick start your workday with a healthy meal to help boost your nutrient intake, energy and memory. This can also help you manage your weight and possibly improve your eating habits during your shift.

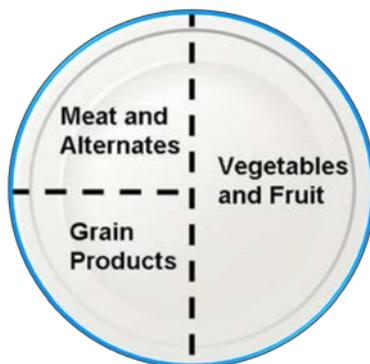
No matter what shift you work, starting your workday with a nutritious meal is important. Depending on your schedule, your breakfast or first meal may be in the morning or the evening. If you skip the first meal, your body and brain will lack energy and calories, and you may not be able to function to the best of your ability.

If you don't have an appetite when you first wake up, try starting with one or two foods at a time. Here are some examples:

- Fruit, or unsweetened applesauce
- Small whole grain muffin, barley, quinoa or oat porridge
- Lower fat cheese, milk or fortified soy beverage
- Hard-boiled egg, or unsalted nuts and seeds



Next, aim to have a meal with 3–4 of the food groups from [Canada's Food Guide](#). Here are some simple balanced meal ideas:



- Whole grain toast topped with peanut butter and a sliced banana
- Whole wheat tortilla filled with scrambled eggs, shredded cheese, and sliced peppers
- Oatmeal, berries and milk

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At work – Remember that making healthy choices at meal and break times is important to staying fueled throughout your shift. Plan ahead and pack a meal with healthy foods from home.

Try new ideas:

- *Lunch Bowl*: brown rice or quinoa, red peppers, avocado, salsa, cheese, and black beans or chicken
- *Snazzy Salad*: arugula, strawberries, pears, goat cheese and almonds or pecans. Drizzle with balsamic dressing. Add a whole grain bun
- *This and That*: Greek yogurt, whole grain crackers, hard-boiled egg and a piece of fruit

Eating Out:

If eating out with co-workers choose restaurants offering healthy choices. Try one or all of tips:

- Downsize on portions – ask for half, share with others or save for leftovers for another meal
- Choose dishes that are steamed, grilled or roasted
- Get the sauces, dressings and condiments served on the side and use only small amounts
- Build yourself a ‘Healthy Plate’ – order vegetables as a side dish, or add a salad on the side.



Snacks:

If you choose to snack, choose foods from [Canada’s Food Guide](#).

Foods higher in fat, sugar and/or salt such as chips, candy, pop, or fruit flavoured drinks are not healthy options. Unsweetened 100% fruit juice has no added sugar but contains natural sugar and little or no fibre. These foods tend to be common in vending machines. If choices are limited in the vending machine, choose smaller portions of these items.

To avoid buying from vending machines, keep food at your work place.

Some healthy options are unsweetened dried fruit, whole grain crackers, and unsalted nuts.



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Rethink your Drink

At work, keeping well hydrated can help you stay alert.

Fluids are needed for the body to digest food, cool down, and move nutrients and waste. Did you know... that most adults need 9–12 cups of fluid per day?

- Drink water throughout the day – add lemon, lime, cucumber, or orange slices for flavour
- Opt for water or milk at meals – go for skim, 1% or 2% milk or fortified soy beverages
- Limit fruit juice to ½ cup (125 mL) per day – remember whole vegetables and fruit have fibre and lower amounts of natural sugar.

Sugary drinks such as regular pop, sports drinks, sweetened hot or cold drinks are often higher in calories, lower in nutrients, and can contribute to weight gain. Limit these drinks to help you manage your weight and reduce your risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

What's the buzz on caffeine-containing drinks?

Caffeine is a mild stimulant of the central nervous system. It triggers an adrenaline rush similar to when the body is under extreme stress.

Too much caffeine can be harmful. Some common side effects include: increased heart rate, stomach upset, headaches, nervousness, irritability, and restlessness.

Coffee, coffee-based drinks, some teas, pop and energy drinks contain caffeine. Adults should limit caffeine to no more than 400 mg per day. This is equal to 2–3 cups of coffee (500–750 mL) per day.

There are better ways to boost your energy:

- Choose healthy foods from Canada's Food Guide
- Drink water throughout the day



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Survive the Mid-Shift Slump

Have you experienced that time in your shift when it seems you cannot concentrate, your eyes get heavy, and you feel sluggish or sleepy?

It's normal to go through a mid-shift slump. Our biological clock causes us to feel sleepy since our body naturally releases hormones that create a tired feeling. Learning to work with your body's internal clock does not have to be a struggle.

Keep energized throughout your shift with these helpful tips:

- Choose healthy foods at meals and break times that have protein and fibre to help you feel full at meals
- Drink water to stay hydrated.



Other ideas that can help:

- On a break, go for a brisk walk for 10 minutes or longer
- Connect with others. Chat with a co-worker who is also on break
- Get enough sleep. Most adults need 7–9 hours per night.

Shift to healthy eating at work!

The food and drink choices you make while at work play a major part in maintaining your health and energy levels.

