Eating for Energy
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The foods we eat everyday have a direct impact on our overall energy and our ability to concentrate. The most important thing to remember is to avoid eating processed foods, as these are often full of salt, sugar, saturated fat and have very little nutritional value.

Eating whole grains, lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, healthy fats and drinking plenty of water will give us all the energy we need.

What You Should Eat

There are four basic building blocks of nutrition that your body needs everyday for energy, these are:

**Protein**
Adequate protein is essential to keep your body functioning properly. Our cells and immune system rely on protein for maintenance and re-building. Our bodies do not have the ability to store protein, that's why eating a small amount of protein everyday is so important.
Good sources of protein are: lean meats (chicken, turkey, beef, lamb), fish, pulses, lentils, quorn, tofu & cheese.

**Carbohydrates**
Carbohydrates provide our bodies with energy, so it is important that we have carbohydrates in our diet.
Good sources of carbohydrates are: wholemeal pasta, potatoes, bread, rice, couscous, bulgur wheat, fresh fruit and vegetables.

**Fat**
Fat is an excellent form of fuel for energy, it is easy to include in our diets. There are two kinds of fat, Saturated and Unsaturated: Saturated fat is bad for us, should be kept to a minimum and can be found in cakes, biscuits, pastries, cheeses, cream, butter and fatty meat.
Unsaturated fats are good fats. They can actually help keep cholesterol levels under control.
There are two main types of unsaturated fat – monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats. While monounsaturated fats can lower LDL cholesterol, polyunsaturated fats can lower LDL cholesterol and raise HDL cholesterol levels.
Just simply by eating leaner cuts of meat, plenty of fish and avoiding cakes, biscuits, cheese and too much processed food, you will keep your saturated fat intake to a minimum.

**Water**
Without water, your body cannot generate energy. You should never get to the point where you feel thirsty, if you do this means your body is already dehydrated. Aim to drink at least 6-8 glasses of water during the course of a day to keep your body hydrated.
Skipping Meals

This can have a huge drain on energy levels. Get into the habit of eating meals on a regular basis. Some people do well with the typical three meals a day, and some do well with five or more smaller mini meals spread throughout the day. Find what best works for you and stick to it.

Lifestyle Changes

Simple lifestyle changes such as taking regular exercise and making sure you get enough sleep can help boost energy levels as well.

Shift worker and Nutrition

Working shifts can affect your health by interfering with your "internal body clock", known as the circadian rhythm, that functions to regulate the roughly 24 hour cycle of the human body. Working shifts can throw your circadian rhythm off. For example, your internal body clock tells your body to be awake in the daytime and asleep when it's dark. After working through the night, you may want to go to sleep just when your body thinks it's time to wake up!

Digestive processes slow down in the evening and overnight. When this rhythm is interrupted by shift work, what you eat may be out of sync with what your body is able to process. Fats will not be cleared from the blood stream as efficiently and blood sugars will not be regulated appropriately. That is why some foods that you tolerate well during the day may trouble you if you have them late at night.

Eating well and being active can help you avoid or address some of the key health issues.

Healthy eating tips

To help you feel great and stay alert at home and on the job

- Avoid high-fat, fried or sugary foods.
- Watch your portions
- Stay hydrated
- Eat meals according to time of day, not your shift.
- Cut down on caffeine.
- Have a light snack before bed.
- Stay active.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.
Health issues affecting shift workers

Shiftworkers are highly susceptible to stomach and digestive problems as a result of irregular eating habits.

Working shifts often requires eating at night, a time when the stomach and digestive system are at rest. If we eat a big meal – especially one that includes greasy, spicy, or heavy protein foods – it simply sits. Then we feel full and sluggish.

Thirty to forty-five percent of shiftworkers report chronic stomach problems from the kinds of food they eat during the night and before bed.

Weight gain can also be a problem. This occurs when people eat regular daytime meals and continue to snack throughout the night—more for the stimulation it provides rather than from hunger.

Nighttime snacking not only contributes to weight gain, it often consists of high-fat, high-calorie “junk” food that is hard to digest.

Tips for Healthy Eating

Try to schedule one meal with your family each day. Establish a normal meal schedule regardless of what hours you work. For most people this is three meals a day spaced at consistent intervals.

If you are working a night shift, try to eat a hot meal before midnight and snack thereafter.

Avoid alcohol near bedtime. Avoid food and beverages containing caffeine within four hours of bedtime. Start your “day” regardless of what time it is with high protein and gradually shift to carbohydrates as bedtime approaches. Because protein is difficult to digest, it’s best to choose from lighter sources of protein right before and during work.

The increase in body temperature following a meal high in protein works to delay the drop in body temperature thereby helping to maintain alertness. It will also interfere with achieving a restful sleep. This type of meal should be taken during the second 1/3 of the waking hours when alertness at work is essential and the body is fighting the urge to sleep.

A meal high in carbohydrate taken when the body temperature is dropping will decrease alertness, ability to concentrate and add to the uncontrollable urge to sleep. This type of meal should be taken during the last 1/3 of the waking hours when it is time to begin preparing the body for a restful sleep.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heavy Protein</th>
<th>Light Protein</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Chicken</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>Fish</td>
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<td>High fat cheeses</td>
<td>Veal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Low-fat dairy products</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Legumes (cooked beans, peas, lentils)</td>
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Planning your Meals

**Afternoon or Evening Work**

Regardless of what time you get up, breakfast is probably the most important meal of your day. Eat soon after rising, it helps stimulate metabolism, signifying the beginning of your “day.” If you plan to exercise, do that first. Otherwise, wait at least two hours after breakfast before doing any strenuous exercise.

**Breakfast (8-10am.)**
Protein (from list); Whole-grain bread or cereal; low-fat dairy products; fresh fruit or juice.

**Main Meal (1-2 pm.)**
Light protein (from List); Low fats; Carbohydrates (vegetables, fruits, bread, pasta, potatoes); Caffeine O.K.

**Work Meal Break (7-8pm.)**
Choose foods that are easy to digest. Poultry, fish, vegetables, fruit and whole-grain breads and cereals are good choices. Reduce intake of fats, butter, red meats and fried foods. Avoid spicy foods and rich desserts. Keep this meal light and small. You can supplement with snacks. Soup and vegetable salad-or-soup and sandwich (light protein)-or-Poultry or fish and vegetables. Use salad dressings and sandwich spreads sparingly. Protein; Low fats; Carbohydrates (vegetables, fruit, bread, pasta, potatoes); Low-fat dairy products (If you’re planning to go back to sleep before work, make this meal lighter and smaller.)

**Night Work**

Working at night requires eating lighter, easy to digest foods. Poultry, fish, vegetables, fruit and whole-grain breads and cereals are good choices. Reduce intake of fats, butter, red meat and fried foods. Avoid spicy food and rich desserts.

**Breakfast (5-7pm.) Main Meal**
This is the time for traditional “supper” type foods if you’re going to have them. Protein; Low fats; Carbohydrates (vegetables, fruit, bread, pasta, potatoes); Low-fat dairy products (If you’re planning to go back to sleep before work, make this meal lighter and smaller.)

**Work Meal Break**
Soup and salad-or-Soup and light sandwich-or- Light protein and vegetables.

**Snacks (Before and During Work)**
NO CAFFEINE during second half of shift. Low-fat dairy products; Fruit; Popcorn; Granola; Cereal; Plain cookies; Pretzels; Baked crackers; Dried fruit.
Healthy Eating Ideas for Shift Workers

When you work outside of the hours nine to five, eating regular healthy meals can be tricky. But it’s not impossible. Almost all situations can be overcome using the two P’s – planning and preparation. It is very important to consider the timing and quality of your meals. Digestive problems are common in shift workers due to disruption of the body clock and poor diet. Plan your meals to help you stay alert at work and to relax/sleep when you need to rest.

- Regular light meals/snacks are less likely to affect alertness or cause drowsiness than one single heavy meal;

- Choose foods that are easy to digest such as wholemeal pastas, rice, bread, salad, fruit vegetables and milk products;

- Avoid fatty, spicy and/or heavy meals as these are more difficult to digest. They can make you feel drowsy when you need to be alert. They may also disturb sleep when you need to rest;

- Avoid sugary foods, such as chocolate – they provide a short-term energy boost followed by a dip in energy levels;

- Fruit and vegetables are good snacks as their sugar is converted into energy relatively slowly and they also provide vitamins, minerals and fibre;

- Drink plenty of fluid as dehydration can reduce both mental and physical performance but avoid drinking too much fluid before sleeping as this may overload the bladder;

- Avoid drinks with caffeine for a few hours before the end of a shift as this may affect your ability to sleep/rest.

Just by setting aside half an hour to plan your meals for the week ahead you will save lots of time and money! Taking that time to plan and prepare will save you from the quick alternatives like pre-packed breakfast muffins, pasties and sausage rolls which are high in calories and saturated fat.

Electric Slow Cookers are available from hardware stores and supermarkets, they allow you to put all the ingredients into one pot and leave cooking for 7 or 8 hours, meaning that you have a nutritious meal to come home to or take to work. They even come with a recipe book!

Here are some healthy quick and easy ideas for breakfast and lunch on the go! All of the following can be prepared in advance for convenience and kept fresh in the fridge before your shift starts.
**Breakfast**

**Quick naturally sweet porridge oats**

1-2oz porridge oats  
a handful of raisins/sultanas to add sweetness (optional)  
boiling water/hot skimmed milk or soya milk

**Porridge in a Flask**

Put porridge oats and water, skimmed milk or soya milk into a pan and bring to boil. Turn off and transfer porridge into a wide mouthed flask, add some sultanas or raisins for natural sweetness or honey to taste.  
Close the lid of the flask tightly and take to work with you.  
Eat when hungry, add banana and or yoghurt for a tasty breakfast! Keeps warm for about 6 hours.

**Fruit and Yoghurt Smoothie**

½ to ¾ cup of your favourite fruit, such as peaches, pineapple, strawberries, mangoes etc.  
¾ to 1 cup of natural low fat yoghurt.  
1 to 1 ¼ cups of semi/skimmed milk

**Method**

Chop fruit into small pieces, (leaving skin on if using apples or pears for added fibre) Put all of the ingredients together in a blender and puree until smooth.  
Keep chilled in fridge until ready to go to work then transfer to a flask.  
A banana will need to be added if you want a thicker consistency, frozen fruit can also be used as an alternative to fresh. Tinned fruit is also a healthy option as long as it is in its natural juice and not syrup

**Fruit and Natural yoghurt crunch**

Chopped mixed fresh fruit/alternative is dried fruit  
low fat natural yoghurt  
Kashi Go Lean Crunch or any Granola Cereal will be fine, (check saturated fat and sugar content).

**Method**

Chop fruit and put in plastic airtight container add 3-4 tablespoons of natural yoghurt, store in fridge until ready to leave for work. Put Kashi Go Lean Crunch/Granola cereal into separate tub to add to fruit and yoghurt as required.
Lunches

**Nicoise Pasta Lunchbox**

40g wholemeal pasta spirals/shells  
125g green beans, cut into thirds  
1 egg  
200g tin of tuna in spring water, drained and flaked  
100g cherry tomatoes, halved  
2 little gem lettuces, leaves separated

**Dressing**

1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice  
1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil  
1 small garlic clove crushed or half teaspoon of garlic granules  
2 heaped tablespoons of chopped fresh basil or 1 tablespoon of dried basil  
fresh ground black pepper to season

**Method**

Cook the pasta in a saucepan of boiling water for about 12 minutes or until tender. Add the green beans to the pan for the last 3 minutes of cooking time. Drain the pasta and beans then refresh briefly with cold water. Meanwhile hard boil the egg, peel egg and leave to cool and cut in half. Whisk the dressing ingredients together with the seasoning in a mixing bowl. Mix in the pasta and beans, flaked tuna and cherry tomatoes. Use the leaves of one of the lettuces and arrange to cover the bottom of a small lunch box, and top with half of the Nicoise pasta mix. Use one half of the boiled egg to place on top of the Nicoise salad, seal lunch box with airtight lid and keep in the fridge until you go to work. The rest of the Nicoise pasta mix, lettuce and egg can also be stored in the fridge and used for the next day’s lunch.

**Wholemeal Pitta Pockets filled with grilled Turkey/Chicken Breast and Salad**

Wholemeal pitta bread  
Mixed salad  
Cooked turkey or chicken breast  
Low fat vinaigrette dressing (optional)

**Method**

Cut pitta bread to make into a pocket, add cooked turkey/chicken breast into pocket with a drizzle of dressing if desired. Wrap in cling film to keep fresh, store in refrigerator until you go to work
Quick Veggie Soup

1 bag of ready prepared vegetables for soup (you can buy this in the veg aisle at supermarket)
1 vegetable stock cube (low salt if possible)

Method

Bring ¾ pint of water to the boil then add vegetables and stock cube bring back to the boil then cover and simmer for 25 minutes. When soup is ready fresh you can leave it chunky or blend for a smoother texture. This should make enough soup for two days and can be kept in the fridge for at least three days. If not using straight away reheat in Microwave when needed and take to work in a wide mouthed flask to eat on the go. Accompany soup with wholemeal/granary bread/rolls with a low fat spread

Grilled Pitta Strips and Dips with Low Fat Humus or Tzatziki

Wholemeal pitta bread cut into strips and grilled Carrot, celery and cucumber batons Low fat humus/tzatziki

Method

Cut pitta bread into medium size strips and lightly grill, cut carrots, celery and cucumber into batons. Put grilled pitta strips, carrots, cucumber and celery in an airtight container and eat on the go for a quick healthy lunch with a pot of the humus or tzatziki.