

Night Shift Nutrition

It is well documented that working night shift can disrupt your circadian rhythm and lead to biological disturbances. Specifically, circadian misalignment is associated with negative health outcomes related to metabolic and gastrointestinal health, cancer, heart health, and mental health (James et al, 2017). Is working night shift sabotaging your nutrition goals? I posed this question to several night shift nurses, and the answer is a resounding yes! Below are two very revealing quotes:

“I have gained so much weight and I attribute that to [working] night shift. It's terrible, you eat whatever and whenever and there's no plan of how to eat.”— *Faith A., RN*

“There is always a lot of temptation such as snacks and goodies in the break room at night which does not help and makes it challenging to eat healthy.”— *Alicia F., RN*

What are some actions you can take to navigate the nutrition challenges of shift work?

1. Consume your main meal before the start of your shift. Select foods that are high in fiber and lean protein which will help to sustain your energy.
2. Pack your meals/snacks to prevent the temptation of frequenting the vending machines or indulging in unit treats such as cookies, cakes, and donuts. Though junk foods might be convenient and easily accessible, they are loaded with extra calories and overconsumption can lead to weight gain.
3. Swap high sugar foods and drinks for nutritious foods which will provide consistent energy. Looking for some healthy options? Consider adding the following items to your lunch bag:
 - a) Hummus with veggies
 - b) String cheese with fruit
 - c) Nuts & seeds (almonds, pumpkin seeds, peanuts, etc.)
 - d) Boiled eggs
 - e) Greek yogurt with fruit
 - f) Sprouted bread with avocado
4. Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! Staying hydrated will help you stay alert.
5. Consider intermittent fasting.
6. Find a routine that works for you and stick with it!

Healthy Nurses, share your tips for healthy habits on night shift in our [Facebook group](#). If you do not have a Facebook account, please send your ideas to healthynurse@njsna.org

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Reference: James, S. M., Honn, K. A., Gaddameedhi, S., & Van Dongen, H. (2017). Shift work: Disrupted circadian rhythms and sleep-implications for health and well-being. *Current Sleep Medicine Reports*, 3(2), 104–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40675-017-0071-6>