

Ease shift work with healthy eating

➔ Welcome to the first in a *Lamp* series on health and fitness for nurses juggling shift work and busy lives. This month we look at how to eat properly when doing shift work.

Working long hours and switching from one shift to another – especially going from day to night duty – can play havoc with your body. So it's important to look after yourself.

One of the things you can do to improve your energy and overall health is to eat a healthy diet, rich in vitamins and minerals. Those chocolate bars and packets of crisps in the vending machines at work may be tempting – but they're probably doing you more harm than good, reducing your energy levels and stamina even further.

So, what should you eat before a night shift, or when you experience a drop in energy and have a craving for a sugar fix?

'On night shift, eat small, light meals, with lots of raw salads, nuts, fruit and vegies, which will give you energy but not make you sleepy,' says Dr Tracie O'Keefe DCH, ND, a naturopath and doctor of clinical hypnotherapy at the Australian Health and Education Centre in Glebe.

'Sometimes shifts are long, so if you take sandwiches, make them wholegrain bread. Try gluten-free bread. The older you get, the more difficult gluten is to digest and it can block the bowel. A healthy bowel that is moving will give you more energy.'

Donuts and cakes may give you an instant 'buzz' but the downside is that you'll crash, and large amounts of refined sugar can lead to extreme mood swings. Cut down on these and instead visit the 'health' section of the supermarket or your local health food store for tasty snack bars to put in your lunch box. Dried fruit is another

option that will give you a sweet 'hit' but in a less harmful way.

The same goes for drinks. Cut down on the cans of Coke and other fizzy drinks (even the 'diet' variety) and avoid beverages with caffeine as you'll find it harder to sleep when you get home. Caffeine can also cause mood swings. Instead, go for fruit juice or water – it's important to keep hydrated, as dehydration can lead to headaches and fatigue.

Eating healthily means being organised, says Dr O'Keefe. 'Support your body with small, more frequent eating – grazing. Keep a diary to monitor the foods and portions that help you get through the night well and review your progress over a couple of months, just like you would with a patient's vital signs.'

You don't have to make radical changes to your diet straight away – start by cutting down on refined, high-sugar junk food products and replacing them with healthier alternatives – and feel the difference! ■



DR TRACIE O'KEEFE'S SALAD SUPREME

If you're ready for a delicious and super-healthy meal, this is it:

- Smoked tofu chunks (protein)
- Mixed lettuce leaves including rocket for flavour and some dark leaves (B complex & folic acid)
- Shredded raw carrot (vitamins A & C)
- Sliced cucumber (wonderful for rehydration)
- Pineapple cubes (aids digestion)
- Red capsicum (very high in vitamin C)
- Small sweet tomatoes (antioxidant, glutathione)
- Varied raw beanshoots (protein & minerals)
- Chopped mint (digestion, calming, glucose management)
- Chopped raw garlic (anti-infective, lowers cholesterol)
- Lemon juice (stimulates bile).



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