Meal Plan for People Who Work Late Nights

By Kate Bradley

Working late nights frequently interferes with the body's natural rhythms, causing gastrointestinal problems, appetite changes and significant weight loss or gain. The key to healthy eating in a late-night job is to establish a meal schedule that fits your "day," whatever the hours. Avoid fatty, salty foods and sugary soft drinks. Stick to filling, healthy foods that won't weigh you down and nix liquid calories by drinking water. Working late nights doesn't have to mean weight gain.

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Breakfast

No matter what time you get up, eat a healthy meal to kick-start your metabolism. Go for a light, healthy breakfast of whole grains, such as bran cereal, oatmeal or wheat toast, fresh fruit, fruit juice and low-fat dairy products. If you need something more substantial, add scrambled egg whites or lean turkey bacon. Skip fried foods and sugary cereals at breakfast; they have no nutritional value and will only weigh you down. Have coffee if you like but nix extra sugar and milk.
Lunch

Lunch should be a late-night worker's main meal and the one that provides the most calories. Eat sensibly to provide your body with a steady flow of energy that lasts halfway through your shift. Choose a light protein, such as grilled chicken, veal or tuna. Pair it with vegetables and healthy carbohydrates, such as plain baked or boiled potatoes and whole-wheat pasta or bread. Add a small, light dessert if you wish. Caffeine is permissible at this meal, but watch your sugar intake: Too much and you can find yourself crashing and eating more before you even leave for work.

Dinner

If you work late nights, you probably eat dinner on the job. Avoid prepackaged frozen foods and vending-machine treats, which pack on pounds via excess carbs, sugar and sodium. Bring a meal that is easy to digest and won't sit heavily on your stomach. Skip fried foods, rich desserts, spicy foods, red meat, butter and fat. Instead, go with a light meal of poultry or fish paired with fresh or roasted vegetables. Do not add salt to your food. Have water with your meal, not soda. Soups, salads and sandwiches are other options, provided you keep fat and sodium content to a minimum. Replace full-fat salad dressings with olive oil and vinegar or a fat-free dressing.

Snacks

Avoid caffeine during the last half of your shift. If you need a snack on the job, try healthy foods such as dried fruit, nuts, popcorn, baked crackers and cereal. Pack your snacks before you leave, but don't eat them until your stomach is growling. That will let you know that you are truly hungry and not just bored. After work and before you go to sleep, eat a light snack that is high in carbohydrates, such as toast with jam or breakfast cereal.