

## Nutrition Necessities

For shift workers in the pipeline industry, the body is the most essential tool on the job site. Working long hours, sometimes in remote locations or in control rooms more than an hour from home, places significant demands on physical and mental alertness. This can only be sustained through proper fueling. Although fast food and vending machine snacks can be convenient options before, after or during a grueling 12-hour shift, these choices can lead to increased fatigue. To maintain well-being and long-term health, shift workers need to approach their nutrition with the same precision they apply to their technical work.

The secret to successful nutrition for shiftworkers is effective planning. When working a 12-hour shift away from home, your lunch box can become a lifeline. A balanced meal should consist of three main components: complex carbohydrates for sustained energy, lean proteins for muscle repair and satiety, and healthy fats for brain function.

Instead of opting for a heavy, greasy burger that can leave you feeling sluggish, try a whole-grain sandwich with lean turkey or tuna, or a thermos of hearty lentil soup. By preparing your meals on your days off, you can ensure that when hunger hits at work, you have a nutrient-rich option ready, keeping you energized for the demands of the day.

For a shiftworker, breakfast is simply the meal that breaks the fast before you head to work, whether that is at 5:00 am or 5:00 pm. Skipping this meal forces your body to run on empty, which can lead to irritability and a lack of focus. A high-protein start, such as Greek yogurt with berries, or eggs on whole-wheat toast, stabilizes blood sugar levels from the moment you clock-in. This initial intake of nutrients and energy is critical for navigating the start of shift when key shift turnover details are transferred, and safety-critical decisions are often made.

Long gaps between major meals can cause blood glucose levels to drop, leading to brain fog. Healthy snacks act as fuel for your brain and your body. Instead of reaching for a bag of chips or a candy bar, opt for snacks that offer a mix of fiber and protein. Trail mix with nuts and dried fruit, an apple, grapes, or hummus with carrots, provides a steady release of energy without the spike and subsequent collapse of processed foods and refined sugars.

In addition to making healthy choices, it is also important to prioritize hydration. Hydration is not just a health choice, it is a safety requirement. Dehydration is a leading cause of fatigue, headaches, and slowed reaction times. It's easy to forget to drink water when busy, shiftworkers should aim for consistent water intake throughout the day. By the time you feel thirsty, you are likely already slightly dehydrated. Keeping a reusable water bottle within reach and sipping regularly helps maintain blood volume and regulates body temperature, especially when working near heavy machinery or pipelines.

When it comes to hydration, caffeine is a tool often overused by shift workers. While a cup of coffee can provide a necessary alertness boost, relying too much on energy drinks or excessive caffeine can disrupt sleep patterns after your shift ends. Use caffeine strategically, ideally at the start of your shift, and avoid it in the 4 to 6 hours before you plan to sleep. This way, when your head finally hits the pillow, your body can actually recover.

By focusing on balanced meals, staying hydrated with water, and snacking smart, you are fueling your body for high performance. Proper nutrition is your best defense against fatigue, ensuring you remain alert and fit-for-duty.

