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IT CAN BE A HARD DAY'S NIGHT FOR WEIGHT-WATCHERS ON THE LATE SHIFT

LOS ANGELES (Nov 7, 2006) – Working the night shift might be good for your paycheck, but it can be tough on your body.

Maintaining a healthy diet can be challenging when our natural circadian rhythms – the daily activity cycles that tell our body to be awake during daylight hours and asleep when it's dark – change dramatically because of our work schedule. To encourage healthcare workers on the late shift to maintain a healthy lifestyle, nutritionists at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center have provided healthy eating tips to night workers to help them be more productive and alert at work.

Netty Levine, R.D., a registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator at Cedars-Sinai, said that “Some night shift workers eat at work in order to maintain their stamina, then go home and eat with their families. People can lose sight of portion control.” Levine added that sleep deprivation is also a common problem. “People working the night shift may consume large amounts of caffeine-laden beverages to stay awake, then – if they are parents – they may be forced to stay awake during the day in order to drive their children to and from school and other activities,” she added. Recent studies have shown that people who do not get sufficient sleep are more prone to being overweight.

Studies have shown that gastrointestinal problems, particularly ulcers, are more prevalent among shift-workers than others. This is because the digestive system is relatively inactive at night; therefore, some foods can cause digestive problems at night yet be well tolerated if eaten during the day. Other culprits contributing to gastrointestinal problems are snack foods with a high fat content (readily available from vending machines during the wee hours), caffeine and meals eaten in a rush or at irregular times. To prevent heartburn or indigestion, Levine recommends avoiding cabbage, cucumbers, onions, high-fat or fried meals, and spicy foods.

Emily Mitchell and Rhonda Weidelman, both registered dietitians at Cedars-Sinai's Nutrition Counseling Center, advise night shift workers to exercise either before or midway through their shift, to help maintain alertness and overall cardiovascular health. “We encourage employees to take part of their one-hour break during their shift to walk on the sidewalks around the hospital,” Mitchell said. “Short bouts of exercise can help you feel more alert and energized in the last part of your shift.”

Weidelman advises bringing healthy foods from home to help consume fewer calories and fat, and also to save money and time.

Here are some healthy nutrition tips for night shift workers from the Nutrition Counseling Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center:

- Eat small, regular meals with a balance of whole grain carbohydrates, protein, and heart-healthy fats before 1 a.m. Choose carbohydrates that are low in fat and high in fiber like whole grain bread, fruit, and low-fat dairy.
- Eat a turkey sandwich on whole grain bread with a green salad or fruit on the side. Try mustard or hummus on the bread instead of mayonnaise, and substitute spinach for lettuce.
- Don't forget about last night's dinner: prepare more than you can eat and take some leftovers for lunch.
- A frozen, low-fat, low-sodium dinner such as Lean Cuisine or Healthy Choice can be supplemented with a piece of fruit, veggies or low-fat yogurt.
- For snacks, bring fruit, vegetables, low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese, whole wheat crackers, pretzels or popcorn.
- Avoid caffeine at least five hours before bedtime.

And finally, when your shift is over, have a very light meal or snack before you go to bed. By avoiding going to bed too full or too hungry, you'll improve the quality of your sleep.

Sweet dreams! See you tomorrow night ...

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