

# Eating Well on the Go

## Agency Considerations to Improve Officer Nutrition and Well-Being

Good nutrition, adequate hydration, and routine physical activity can have positive physiological impacts on an officer's ability to perform their duties safely and effectively. When a police officer receives proper nutrition training and education by the department, they can be better equipped to face the physical and mental demands of the job while ensuring their overall wellness.

### How Nutrition Impacts Work Performance

The following considerations highlight how different aspects of nutritional wellness can impact the performance of an on-duty officer:



Not eating enough or choosing the wrong food options can result in low blood sugar levels, or **hypoglycemia**. Hypoglycemia can result in lightheadedness or dizziness, blurred or impaired vision, weakness, or fatigue.<sup>1</sup>



After eating a high-calorie, high-fat meal, the risk of a **heart attack** increases for two hours, especially if an officer is overweight.<sup>2</sup>



An obese officer is more likely to be injured in a vehicle collision and incur more **severe injuries** than an officer at a healthy weight.<sup>3</sup>



**Dehydration** can contribute to tiredness, dizziness, or lightheadedness on the job.<sup>4</sup>

### How and When to Provide Education

While eating well is as important to officer safety and wellness as wearing a bullet-resistant vest and seat belt, it can be a difficult lifestyle behavior to promote. The following is a list of recommendations for how and where agencies can promote nutrition education to officers throughout the agency.



#### Academy Training Curriculum:

Academy training provides a structured environment to introduce the importance of nutrition to new officers. By introducing healthy eating concepts alongside other training topics, recruits can begin to understand how nutrition relates to the larger picture of officer

safety and performance. Potential topics to cover during academy sessions include:

- the importance of healthy eating and facts behind nutrition and health;
- suggestions of what to eat both on and off duty;
- how to plan meals ahead of schedule;
- what to eat when faced with little time for preparation.

Education in the academy environment is the first step to instill positive and career-long nutritional wellness. Academy staff are encouraged to model healthy eating habits to recruits, through offering refrigerator access to store a healthy meal for the day and ensuring easy access to water stations.

1 American Diabetes Association. Hypoglycemia (Low blood glucose). Retrieved from <http://www.diabetes.org/living-with-diabetes/treatment-and-care/blood-glucose-control/hypoglycemia-low-blood.html>

2 American Heart Association. (2000 November 21). Heavy Meals May Trigger Heart Attacks. ScienceDaily. Retrieved July 2, 2014 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2000/11/001120072759.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2000/11/001120072759.htm)

3 Rice, T., Zhu, M. (2013 January 21) Emergency Medical Journal. Driver obesity and the risk of fatal injury during traffic collisions. Retrieved from <http://emj.bmj.com/content/31/1/9> The National Institute of Justice's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/189633.pdf>

4 Mayo Clinic. Diseases and Conditions - Dehydration. Retrieved July 2, 2014 from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dehydration/basics/symptoms/con-20030056>



**In-Service Reinforcement:** As officers progress through their careers, they may face new health concerns that could be directly related to nutrition and physical activity. Keeping nutrition education as a priority for officers at any stage of their career can be accomplished through:

- Requiring annual or semi-annual in-service education on nutrition and physical fitness.
- Reminding officers to schedule an annual physical or wellness exam with their primary care provider.
- Sharing department-wide nutrition recommendations via weekly emails, roll calls, posters, and pamphlets.
- Opting for healthier catering options during special events.
- Providing vending machines with healthy food and drink options instead of sugary snacks and drinks.



**Consultation with Experts:** While nutrition information is seemingly readily available on the Internet, it also may be useful for an agency to partner with a local hospital, medical personnel, or a dietitian to provide tips and strategies catered to officers.



**Leadership and Mentoring:** Having the support and encouragement of supervisors and executives is important to promoting a healthy eating and exercise culture. First-line supervisors have the most interaction with officers, and with

their leadership role comes the responsibility to promote healthy habits among the officers they supervise. Supervisors and agency leadership are in a unique position to encourage positive nutrition behaviors and habits. This can be achieved through the following:



**Lead by Example:** Model healthy eating and hydration.



**Know Meal Options:** Remind officers to research what restaurants and grocery stores are open based on their dietary needs and shift assignment.



**Utilize Meal Breaks:** Encourage officers to take a break and leave their cars to eat when possible to establish an eating routine and also get the benefits of physical activity.



**Carry Healthy Snacks and Water:** Encourage officers to have healthy food on hand, as there are inevitably times when breaks and meal routines will be disrupted.



**Link Fitness with Nutrition:** Organize a pre-shift group run among officers ending with a healthy group breakfast to promote camaraderie.

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