Be Aware of the Link Between Stress & Food

Be mindful of the connection between stress—work and life—and the food you consume. Choose healthy food options in times of stress to lead to clearer thinking, increased energy, and better overall health.

Eat Healthy on the Job

Eating healthy while on the job can be particularly challenging given the unpredictability of law enforcement duties. Advance planning and thoughtful discussion of the realities of shift work can assist in better eating habits while on the job.

Assemble a week’s worth of meals in advance to make it easier to eat healthy when facing an unpredictable and often shifting schedule. Having easy, healthy meal options ready is especially important for night shift officers who may not have the same access to restaurants and grocery stores during their shift.

Spend time each week planning out meals, grocery shopping, and cooking lunches, dinners, or midnight meals. Make meal planning and preparation a family event—it can be fun. Not only does this help your family prepare for the week ahead but it offers an opportunity to model good eating habits to your children.

Keep healthy snacks in your car, desk, or bike. Almonds, a low sugar granola bar, or a banana can help tide you over until you can get a filling, nutritious meal rather than settling for the drive through.

Have some go-to healthy options at local restaurants. Sometimes you need to buy meals for the day, having a list of favorite, healthy meal options at local restaurants and grocery stores makes choosing a nutritious option easier.

Enquire at local convenience stores for access to a microwave or toaster oven to heat up your meals when you are out on the job.

Establish an eating routine, to include a break from the stress of your job. Get out of your car, off your bike, or out of the office when you eat to train your brain to have a set meal time—free of distractions and to encourage healthy food consumption.

It seems like what is considered healthy changes every day. Understanding what is healthy and how to teach your family about good eating habits can be challenging given the constant cycle of fad diets and changing food pyramids. With some simple preparation, you and your family can be on track for a healthier lifestyle. Recognizing the important link between nutrition and officer and family health and wellness can lead to better job performance, healthier individuals and families, and safer communities.
**Eat Healthy at Home**

Eating healthy at home can be nearly as challenging as eating healthy at work. Setting family routines when you can and being flexible with your shift schedule can lead to healthier family meals.

- **Make cooking a family event.** Create a family cookbook of favorite, healthy recipes for quick family meals.
- **Law enforcement is at a higher risk of obesity than civilians.** Healthy eating is an important part of overall health and wellness.
- **Make a take-out favorite at home.** Homemade pizza or mac and cheese can be just as satisfying as the take-out version and you know all the ingredients that go into it.
- **Try new recipes regularly.** You might just find your new favorite meal.

**How Can You Create a Healthy Lifestyle?**

Being healthy is more than just working out or excluding all fatty or sugary foods. Find a balance in your diet, exercise, and remember it is about an overall healthy lifestyle, not a temporary diet.

**FOCUS ON VARIETY.**

- **Try new foods as a family.**
- **Choose greater variety in your food—color, nutritional makeup, ingredient makeup**—this can lead to higher energy levels, which is crucial for long and unpredictable shifts.
- **Aim for as many fruits and vegetables as you can.** They make for an easy go-to snack to help keep with you in the patrol car or in the precipice.
- **Remember the less processed your food is, the better it is for you.**
- **If the food can go bad, it is probably good for you.**

**LEARN AND TEACH YOUR FAMILY TO READ NUTRITION LABELS.**

**NUTRITION TO EAT MORE OF:** Getting more of these nutrients, including dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron, can lead to better overall health.

**NUTRITION TO LIMIT:** The American Heart Association recommends aiming for only 5-6% of daily calories coming from saturated fat, **Limit trans fat intake, as it raises poor cholesterol levels and increases the risk of developing heart disease.** Trans fat typically comes from partially hydrogenated oils.

**Recommend fluid intake:** 15.5 cups for men, 11.5 cups for women.

**Use water as your caloric intake source.** Although your needs for fluids depend on:

- **Climate, including the temperature and humidity you are in.**
- **Exertion levels, sweating means you need more fluids.**
- **Overall health, certain medical conditions, including obesity and high blood pressure, require more water intake.**

**Keep in mind how your uniform might make you sweat.**

**Drink Enough Liquids**

**Water is the most ideal fluid as it has zero calories and no added sugars or fats.**

**Don’t drink your calories.** Drinks have a lot of hidden sugars and are a major contributor to obesity. Water is the most ideal fluid as it has zero calories and no added sugars or fats.

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**Carry a refillable water bottle with you to promote more water consumption throughout your day.**

**Make it a family challenge.**

- **Who can get to their recommended water intake the earliest, or who can drink only water throughout the day, no other beverages.**
- **Decorate or buy fun family water bottles.** If your water bottle is fun you just might drink more water.

This publication is one in a series. For more family support resources please visit: www.theIACP.org/ICPRlawenforcementfamily

The IACP’s Institute for Community Police Relations (ICPR) is designed to provide guidance and assistance to law enforcement agencies looking to enhance community trust, by focusing on culture, policies, and practices.

For more information, contact us at:

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- theIACP.org/ICPR
- 800.THE.IACP

**Impactful Resources**


**Broader View: Nutrition & Health.** Eating healthy can be nearly as challenging as eating healthy at work. Setting family routines when you can and being flexible with your shift schedule can lead to healthier family meals.

**Cardiovascular disease and risk factors in law enforcement personnel: a comprehensive review.** Cardiology in review 20, no. 4 (2012): 159-166.

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