



How to eat well when your partner works night shifts

A guide for first responder families



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Introduction

If your partner is a first responder, they may work some night shifts. If you work a more standard week, this means you probably eat lots of meals on your own.

When you're eating alone, it's tempting to simply reach for whatever's on hand, whether it's good for you or not. If you're finding yourself doing this a lot, it can create real risks to your health.

While your partner needs to eat well to get through their shifts, it's also important to take care of yourself.

Eating well benefits your physical and mental health, and reduces your risk of developing a range of health problems from heart disease to depression.

Let's take a look at how you can create healthy habits when you regularly eat alone.

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How to eat well



What problems are associated with eating alone?

People who often eat alone tend to have healthier eating habits than those who eat with their partner, family or friends.

It's true that it can be hard to feel motivated to cook when you're eating alone.

This lack of motivation can have you reaching for the ready-made or simple meals that lack the nutrients you need. That can be okay occasionally, but if it's become a habit, then this can cause some health concerns.

What are the benefits of eating well?

If you've fallen into some unhealthy eating habits while your partner is on shift, don't be hard on yourself. Instead, turn your focus to implementing some healthy changes.

A healthy diet that includes plenty of fresh food can help to lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, as well as being helpful in managing healthy cholesterol levels and weight.

Eating well can also reduce your risk of developing depression and can help to ease anxiety.

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When your partner works night shift



How can you eat well while your partner's at work?

Prepare meals that are easy to reheat

When one of you cooks a healthy meal, it can then be eaten by the other at a time that suits your schedule.

Freeze extra portions

Cook larger amounts than you need, and put some in the freezer. When you're feeling unmotivated or you're busy, you can reach for something that's both healthy and easy.

Eat with friends

Set up a regular time to eat with friends. Social support is important, and eating with others is the perfect way to connect with the people you like.

Create a meal plan

Communicating with your partner is important for a happy relationship, so try keeping a list of which meals are planned during the week, and who will cook each of them.

Encourage each other to eat well

A healthy diet is a team effort, and that support helps you both stick to healthy eating guidelines.

Find the joy in eating alone

While it might not be your choice, try to find some pleasure in eating alone at times. A regular 'date' with yourself might encourage you to cook yourself something special that nurtures your health.

Try to encourage each other to eat well.



Where's a good place to start in eating healthier?

It's common for people who eat alone to not consume enough vegetables, and this can cause many health problems.

So, if you're keen to eat a more healthy diet, this is a great place to start.

Experts recommend eating at least five serves of vegetables each day. A serving size is half a cup of cooked vegetables, or one cup of raw vegetables.

When you eat more vegetables, you're less likely to crave foods that contain processed sugar.

How can you get more vegetables into your diet?

Make a plate of vegetable sticks for a snack, with hommus or another low-fat dip.

Set yourself a challenge to include cooked vegetables or a salad with your dinner every night.

Use frozen veggies – they're just as nutritious, and easy to throw into a stirfry, frittata, soup or pie.

Add some 'hidden' veggies to your meals: grated carrot and chopped celery in a pasta sauce, a few mushrooms in your toasted sandwich, and roasted pumpkin in a risotto.

Next time you're at the shops, choose a vegetable you haven't tried before, and give it a go. This will help you get a bit of variety into your diet, and have some fun experimenting.

Make it convenient to eat vegetables by having them pre-chopped in containers in your fridge. If they're easy to grab, you're more likely to choose them.

Try eating a rainbow of vegetables and fruits each day. Every colour has its own unique health benefits, so eating some of each will help you get the nutrients you need.



How can mindful eating help you?

Just like mindfulness is about being in the present moment, mindful eating encourages you to pay attention to only your food as you eat.

Why? Well, it's easy to seek distractions when you're eating alone, making it more likely that you'll eat larger portion sizes and make unhealthy food choices.

Mindful eating can help you make healthy food choices, as well as making eating your meal a more pleasurable experience.

Here are some helpful tips to try and eat more mindfully:

Notice the colours, smells, flavours and textures of your food before you eat and while you're consuming it.

Don't eat in front of a screen, like the TV or a device.

Chew slowly.

Set a timer for 20 minutes, and take that whole time to eat your meal.

If you're tempted to add more food to your plate, stop and ask yourself if you're really hungry.

Let go of any judgement you have about your eating habits, so you can be open to making different choices.



Contact us

Are you...

A first responder who is struggling?

Reach out to our team for specialised help and support.

For more information on who can access our services, visit the Who we serve page on our website, fortemaustralia.org.au/who-we-serve.

To speak with a professional at Fortem Australia, please contact us by email or phone.

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