

Night Eating: Myths and Facts

It's the middle of the night, you're at work and you're starving. There are carrot sticks in the fridge, burgers and chicken fingers from the all-night takeout place, and doughnuts in the break room. What's best to eat? Or is it better to skip eating at night altogether? Cut through the confusion for healthier digestion and better sleep.

Myth or Fact? Eating at night makes you gain weight.

Myth. Nighttime eating doesn't cause weight gain on its own. The key to maintaining a healthy weight is taking in the right amount of overall calories for your body, age and activity level. Your body will convert excess calories to fat, no matter what time you consume them.

Myth or Fact? Eating a big, heavy meal will help you sleep.

Myth. It takes a lot of energy to digest a heavy meal and several hours for your stomach and digestive tract to empty. Eating a heavy meal before bed is likely to keep you up.



Myth or Fact? Eating at night leads to heartburn.

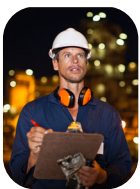
Fact. Shiftwork has been linked to a higher incidence of heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD. Eating your main meal within 2 to 3 hours of bedtime, which causes digestive acid to back up into your esophagus when you lie down, can worsen GERD. The solution is to time your main meal so you eat it before work or midway through your shift, not just before bed.

Your Body Clock Decoded

Your body has a **biological clock** that controls many of its processes and functions, such as:

- ✓ Sleep.
- ✓ Body temperature.
- ✓ Hormone production.
- ✓ Digestion and hunger.

You respond physically and mentally to light exposure, which brings about changes in how you feel and behave, and in how your body functions. This is called your **circadian rhythm**.



When you work shifts, your circadian rhythm becomes disrupted. This can lead to minor problems, such as feeling irritable and unfocused or having trouble falling asleep. It can also contribute to more serious problems over time, such as weight gain, sleep disorders, depression, diabetes and digestive tract problems.

You might not be able to change your schedule, but here are 3 ways to minimize the effects of disrupting your circadian rhythm as much as possible.

- 1 Keep to a schedule.** Stick to the same sleep and wake times, even on weekends and days off. If you rotate shifts, make a gradual change over a few days to give your body time to adjust.
- 2 Control light exposure.** Get exposure to bright light in the morning if you are up for the day, and wear dark glasses if you're commuting home in daylight to sleep. Darken your sleeping area if you sleep during the day, and make your overnight workspace as brightly lit as possible.

- 3 Take care of your health.** Eat a healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Avoid saturated and trans fats, added sugars and processed foods. Avoid tobacco and alcohol (if you smoke, take steps to quit). Exercise regularly to help counteract the health effects of circadian rhythm disruption, balance the body's hormones and functions, and improve sleep.



Adjusting to Daylight Saving Time

Springing forward into Daylight Saving Time (DST) isn't as simple as setting clocks forward an hour on March 8. Your body has to adjust. Be aware that DST carries risks. The U.S. Bureau of Labor suggests that workplace accidents increase the workday after DST starts. There is also a higher risk for car accidents when you're sleepy. And cardiovascular research shows people with heart disease are more susceptible to heart attack right after DST due to sleep deprivation stress. In addition, Penn State researchers found that cyberloafing on the job — staring at computers instead of being productive — is common immediately after DST begins. **Here are some tips for adjusting to DST:**

- 1. Prepare to spring ahead.** Go to bed 15 to 20 minutes earlier each night the week before and after DST takes effect. Make sleep a priority now.
- 2. Use light to your advantage.** Exposure to light resets your sleep cycle. Go outside and soak in morning sunlight when possible and sleep in a dark room at bedtime.
- 3. Pay attention to your nighttime routine.** Limit caffeine and alcohol before bedtime. Don't exercise late at night — it can keep you awake.

8 Qualities of Well-Being: Practice Them in 2020

With the start of a new year, many of us promise ourselves to become healthier, learn more and generally do better.

Yet most of us have trouble achieving specific goals, such as losing weight or feeling more positive.

Long term, we are more likely to succeed with changes and sustain health by focusing on our overall well-being. Take a broader view and ask yourself: What can I do to achieve better balance and contentment in my life?



Start by learning the dimensions of well-being and practical ways to focus on each:

Physical — Nourish your body with balanced nutrition, daily exercise and proper rest. Get regular provider checkups and immunizations. Practice safety and drive defensively.

Emotional — Know your feelings. Try to find positives in worry and negatives by learning from them. Recognize unhealthy thought patterns and let them go while viewing the good things in your life daily. Relax and relieve the stress.

Spiritual — Find purpose in life. Examine your beliefs and morals. **Ask:** Do I have fulfillment and meaning in my life? It's an ongoing process that can enhance your life and health.

Intellectual — Keep learning. Seek activities that offer different ideas and stimulate critical thinking, curiosity, problem-solving and creativity. Take a class or research a favorite subject.

Vocational — Build professional skills. We gain knowledge and personal satisfaction with occupations that move us forward. Explore different career and volunteer opportunities.

Financial — Manage short- and long-term goals. Start with small changes that add up to savings over time (e.g., make your own coffee rather than buying it). Reconsider unplanned purchases before buying. Build a savings account.

Social — Connect with others. Having trusted relationships can boost your self-esteem and buffer stress. Make time for friends or join groups where you can meet others with similar interests.

Natural — Enjoy nature every day. Take a walk outside, care for plants and notice the seasonal changes. Do your part to preserve the environment — reduce noise, pollution and unnecessary consumption.

ASSIGNMENT: Enjoy Your Free Time

In a 24-hour world, is there ever such a thing as free time? You may look forward to your days off, only to have them pass in a blur of whirlwind activity.

It's time to take back your free hours and use them to recharge, renew and refresh yourself as a reward for the hard work you do. Start by letting go:

- ✓ **Let go of results.** Do things during your free time simply because you want to, without worrying about what you will gain or have to show for it.
- ✓ **Let go of structure.** Do what feels right in this moment — such as taking a walk, listening to music, reading a book, lingering over coffee with a friend or playing in the yard with your kids or the dog.

- ✓ **Let go of electronic stimulation.** Unplug from mobile devices, televisions and computers. You might enjoy your free time even more without these distractions, and you won't lose hours to the screen.

- ✓ **Let go of obligations.** Take time off from obligations such as errands, housework, social events or household projects. Make time to work on your personal goals, practice a hobby, socialize with friends, exercise and play.



The Smart Moves Toolkit, including this issue's printable download, **Boost Your Mood With Exercise**, is at personalbest.com/extras/20V3tools.

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