



STAYING HEALTHY IN THE

How eating right and exercising can help

Health and safety in the workplace is about more than hard hats or safety boots. There are other factors that can be as important for maintaining a healthy and safe workplace.

The “health” aspect of health and safety includes not only the various occupational diseases that arise from workplace exposures but also the more everyday aspects of nutrition, fitness, and a good night’s sleep. In this article, we outline a few of the key areas to consider when addressing healthy lifestyles in the workplace.

Nutrition

Part of a healthy lifestyle is maintaining a good diet and a healthy weight. Workers who are on the road or on the go from job to job may not spend much time thinking about what they are going to eat for lunch. They either pack something quickly from home or head to the nearest fast-food outlet.

So what are the options?

The tried and tested information in “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide” can be helpful. That familiar nutritional rainbow created by Health Canada outlines the four basic food groups and provides both serving suggestions and snack ideas.

Traditional lunch favorites such as peanut butter or meat sandwiches are great for keeping energy levels up during the day. Snacks such as crunchy vegetables, low-sugar granola bars, trail mix, or plain popcorn are a nutritious option.

And don’t forget about water. It’s an important part of a healthy diet, especially during warm weather work. If possible, take a refillable container or insulated bottle for water and add ice before leaving home.

As the temperature changes, your lunch requirements may also change. For example, that peanut butter sandwich that kept you going all summer might not appear so tantalizing after sitting in the work truck in the freezing temperatures of January. Hot soups and stews are a great choice for a nutritious lunch but it can be tricky to keep them warm. Use a thermos or insulated bottle and fill it with boiling hot water for a few minutes to allow the insulated walls to warm up. Warm cereals like oatmeal can also keep your body warm and your energy levels up.

These are just a few of the options to consider. Your local health unit, as well as the Dietitians of Canada, may have additional resources that are as helpful as they are healthful.





WORKPLACE

help you work safe

Fitness and stretching

Stretching before a shift can make a significant impact on your ability to maintain a healthy body. It helps warm you up, increases your flexibility and range of motion, and reduces the chances of strains and sprains. Combining stretching with a fitness routine can reduce stress, increase energy levels, and improve overall health.

Many companies have instituted stretching routines each day to allow workers to ease into their work and help prevent musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). MSDs are injuries of the muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage, or spinal discs. While an MSD may be a less serious injury than a fall or struck-by injury, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) cites MSDs as the most common type of workplace injury in Ontario workplaces. They result in the most lost-time injuries for IHSA member firms and can cause workers significant pain and discomfort.

MSDs are not typically the result of any traumatic event (such as a slip, trip, or fall) but reflect a more gradual or chronic development. Left unaddressed, MSDs threaten both a worker's health and safety and a company's bottom line.

Even a few basic stretches can assist with MSD hazard reduction. The Institute for Work & Health (IWH) has published findings in recent months in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. These findings provide strong evidence that implementing workplace-based resistance training can help prevent and manage MSDs of the neck, shoulder, arm, elbow, wrist, and hand. IHSA can also help. Our pocket-sized *Before You Start Work Exercises Card* (V012) provides illustrations of several warm-up and stretching exercises for workers.

A good night's sleep

Many of us take for granted that a good night's sleep is part of a safe workday. But there are many negative impacts that can plague workers who haven't had enough rest. Workers who don't get enough sleep or who



are negatively affected by shift work can face a number of hazards such as

- Inability to concentrate
- Reduced motor skills
- Errors in judgement.

One study found that new commercial drivers who are classified as obese are 50 per cent more likely to be in an accident.* The main reason for this is fatigue due to irregular sleep patterns and the increased incidence of sleep apnea.

Other research has shown that sleep deprivation can have similar effects as alcohol intoxication. Being awake for 17 hours was shown to be equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.05.†

Generally speaking, people need at least 7.5 to 8.5 hours of sleep each night. The US-based National Sleep Foundation offers these tips for getting a better rest.

- Stick to a sleep schedule of the same bedtime and wake-up time.
- Practice a relaxing bedtime ritual.
- Avoid naps, especially in the afternoon.
- Exercise daily.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature and make sure it is free from distracting noise.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillow.
- Avoid bright light in the evening and expose yourself to sunlight in the morning to keep your circadian rhythms (i.e., body clock) in check.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and heavy meals in the evening.
- Spend the last hour before bed doing a calming activity in order to wind down.
- If you can't sleep, go into another room and do something relaxing until you feel tired.

These suggestions may involve changing some well-established habits, and that can be a challenge. Be patient and stick with the changes you make in order to pave the way to a more healthful future.



* Anderson, Jon E. et al. "Obesity is Associated with the Future Risk of Heavy Truck Crashes among Newly Recruited Commercial Drivers." Institute for the Study of Labour. March 2012. PMC. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.

† Williamson, A, and A. Feyer. "Moderate Sleep Deprivation Produces Impairments in Cognitive and Motor Performance Equivalent to Legally Prescribed Levels of Alcohol Intoxication." *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 57:10 (2000): 649-655. PMC. Web. 11 Jan. 2016.