

## OPERATIONS ROUTINE



### BASIC NUTRITION

Maintaining a heart-healthy and balanced diet is essential to reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases, and to keep the body functioning optimally. This can be achieved by consuming whole foods that provide necessary nutrients, avoiding processed foods and incorporating a variety of vegetables into meals. While the nature of the fire service can make it challenging to stick to a regular eating schedule, aiming to have a well-balanced breakfast and timing meals to occur around midday and early evening can be helpful. Choosing low-sugar snacks and staying hydrated by drinking adequate amounts of water also can promote better overall nutrition and well-being.

The IAFF recommends that fire fighters follow a balanced and heart-healthy diet that provides adequate amounts of macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and fats), micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) and fluids. Here are some basic nutrition guidelines recommended by IAFF:

**Carbohydrates:** Carbohydrates provide energy to the body and are essential for fire fighters who need to perform physically demanding tasks. Complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, vegetables and fruits are recommended over simple carbohydrates such as sugar.

**Proteins:** Proteins are important for muscle repair and growth. IAFF recommends that fire fighters consume lean protein sources such as chicken, turkey, fish, beans and nuts.

**Fats:** Fats provide energy and help the body absorb certain vitamins. IAFF recommends that fire fighters consume healthy sources of fats such as olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds, and limit saturated and trans fats found in fried and processed foods.

**Micronutrients:** Vitamins and minerals are essential for the proper functioning of the body. IAFF recommends that fire fighters consume a variety of fruits and vegetables to ensure they are getting an adequate amount of micronutrients.

**Hydration:** Fire fighters need to stay hydrated to perform at their best. IAFF recommends drinking water regularly throughout the day and consuming sports drinks during intense physical activity to replace lost electrolytes.

It's important to note that the specific nutritional needs of fire fighters may vary based on individual factors such as age, gender, weight and level of physical activity. Therefore, it's recommended to consult with a registered dietitian to develop a personalized nutrition plan.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcohol use is a leading cause of, and a contributing factor in, many forms of cancer. Over time, excessive alcohol use can lead to the development of chronic diseases and other serious problems including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, digestive problems, and cancers of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver and colon. Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.

### SLEEP HYGIENE

Sleep hygiene is important for fire fighters because adequate sleep helps to improve physical and mental health, cognitive function, reaction time and overall job performance. Poor sleep can lead to decreased alertness, reduced decision-making abilities, and increased risk of injury or accidents on the job. Therefore, practicing good sleep hygiene helps to ensure that fire fighters are well-rested and able to perform their duties effectively and safely.

Fire fighters often work long shifts of 24, 48 or more hours, which can have negative effects on their health and contribute to irregular sleep habits. As recommended by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), fire fighters should focus on getting plenty of rest while off-duty and practice good sleep hygiene, rather than exacerbating potential health hazards by going without sleep or limiting the opportunity to get adequate rest when available.

Additionally, working long and irregular hours can lead to poor nutrition, lack of physical activity and other unhealthy habits. This can result in a range of health problems, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes and digestive issues.

Strategies that fire fighters can use to mitigate the negative effects of shift work on their health and well-being include:

**Maintaining a healthy sleep routine:** Fire fighters should aim to maintain a consistent sleep schedule and establish a bedtime routine that helps them relax and wind down before bed.

**Eating a balanced, heart-healthy diet:** Fire fighters should try to eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Eating regularly and avoiding large

A sleep quality study by the University of Washington found that the number of nights on shift in the previous 30 days is associated with an increase in off-shift sleep disturbances.





meals close to bedtime can help maintain a healthy weight and improve sleep quality. Stefanos Kales, MD, MPR, director of the Occupational Medicine Residency at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, advocates for the Mediterranean diet as an effective nutritional approach for fire fighters due to its numerous health benefits, including reduced risk of heart disease, improved weight management and increased overall well-being.

**Staying active:** Physical activity can help improve sleep quality and boost energy levels. Fire fighters can try to incorporate regular exercise into their schedules, even if it means finding short, high-intensity workouts that they can do during breaks or after their shifts.

**Limiting caffeine, alcohol and energy drinks:** Caffeine, alcohol and energy drinks can interfere with sleep, so it's important to limit their intake, especially close to bedtime.

**Building a supportive network:** Fire fighters should try to build a supportive network of friends, family and colleagues who can help them manage the demands of shift work.

**Managing stress:** Stress can have a negative impact on sleep quality, so it's important for fire fighters to develop effective stress-management strategies, such as mindfulness and relaxation techniques, in addition to regular exercise.

**Seeking support:** Fire fighters who experience symptoms of shift work sleep disorders or other health problems related to shift work should seek support from a Peer Support Team member, a healthcare provider or a mental health professional.

By implementing these strategies, fire fighters can help mitigate the negative effects of shift work and improve their overall health and well-being.

## TRAINING: BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Fire fighters are often exposed to traumatic events and hazardous situations on the job, which can take a toll on their mental and emotional health. This can lead to a variety of behavioral health issues such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse. These conditions can have a significant impact on a fire fighter's personal and professional life and can negatively affect their ability to perform their duties effectively.

Therefore, it is crucial to educate fire fighters in the recruit academy on the behavioral health impacts of their job and provide them with tools and resources to create resilience. By doing so, they can better understand the importance of taking care of their mental and emotional well-being and develop coping strategies to manage the stress of their job.

In addition to educating fire fighters on the impact of trauma and stress on their behavioral health, the recruit academy can also provide training on resiliency skills and techniques. This can include mindfulness practices, stress-management techniques, and strategies for building and maintaining supportive relationships. Additionally, recruit academies can provide information on available support resources, such as counseling services, peer support programs and employee assistance programs, which can be beneficial to fire fighters as they navigate the challenges of their job.

In conclusion, educating fire fighters in the recruit academy and throughout their career on behavioral health impacts and ways to create resilience is essential for promoting their mental and emotional well-being, improving job performance and reducing the likelihood of behavioral health problems in the future.