

The Five Steps to Better Nutrition

IN THE FIREHOUSE (AND OUT)



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Prepared for TAHPI Strong and the Memphis Fire Department



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5 Steps to Better Nutrition in (and out) of the Firehouse.

Real healthy eating helps you perform better in life and on the fireground. If you're reading this download, then you obviously have an interest in being the best Fire Rescue Athlete you can be. Let's face the facts; eating healthy in the firehouse or out of it isn't the easiest thing to do. It takes discipline and an avoidance of the kitchen (or whatever place in the firehouse where all the goodies are). Obviously, it is impossible to avoid the kitchen entirely, ***but it is possible to lean out the firehouse (or any house).***

The goal of this information is to give you some simple steps to help you get your nutrition back on-track. This is not a diet. This is a lifestyle. By integrating these simple things into your lifestyle, I know you can lose weight, improve your performance, and become a better fire rescue athlete.

The biggest point I want you to take from these steps is that you need to keep it simple and eat REAL food. Try to get back to the way our ancestors ate: eating unrefined, unadulterated food from the land that nourishes the body. To insure you are eating REAL food you must start Reading ingredients labels. Stick to real foods and you'll be on your way to feeling better and achieving your health goals in no time.

Again, I want you to create a healthy lifestyle and not follow a diet. I hope this information is helpful and puts "eating healthy" in a different perspective for you.

Step 1. Get hydrated. Stay hydrated.

Around most firehouses (and offices) the day and the shift starts with some coffee. We all need a pick-me-up from time to time but before you reach for that second cup, have some water. Water is the center of all metabolic processes, the more hydrated you are the better your performance. Progressive dehydration from exercise (or fire ground operations) impairs performance, mental capacity, perception of effort and can be life-threatening. With as little as a 2% body water shortage, the ability to perform a high intensity activity can be greatly impaired. Translate that on to the fire ground could mean death or injury to you or a crew member because your performance is greatly reduced.

Staying hydrated also helps you eat less. Water is an appetite suppressant and can be part of a strategy to control between-meal snacking. Drinking an 8-oz. glass of water will blunt sensations of hunger within minutes. You may find that you are no longer hungry – or no longer as hungry – and can safely wait until regular mealtime to eat.

To stop dehydration before it starts, you must drink plenty of water at regular intervals and aim to replace fluids at the same rate that they're lost. (At minimum, consume 64 oz. of water a day).

Increase that amount when exercising on duty and after you've completed your workout to avoid being dehydrated at the scene. Follow these recommendations, [click here to download a printable version of hydration guidelines and a great post about the above information](#).

Step 2. Eat your veggies and avoid processed foods.

The next step to eating healthy is to start reading food labels and look at the ingredients. Look for foods that you can recognize in their whole, natural state. Choose to eat more seasonal fruits and vegetables for optimal nutrient density and freshness. They provide the body with muscle and energy promoting nutrients that a firefighter needs to get through the day.



Veggies load your body with the maximum amount of nutrients for the least number of calories, they are a dietary bargain. This does not include vegetable chips or veggie sticks or drinking fruit juice. If the fruit or vegetable in question won't rot after a few days of hanging out on the countertop, then it's a processed food. You should choose green, leafy, lower starch veggies over starchier types. Some examples of these include broccoli, kale, cauliflower, and spinach, and cabbage. Starchier types include potatoes, yams, and sweet potatoes.

On my crew, we like to put some fruits and veggies out on the table (celery, grapes, carrot sticks) and hide the sweets.



Step 3. Minimize added sugars.

This is difficult at first but will really make a huge difference. Try to minimize all sugars. Cakes, candies, breads, crackers, pastas, etc. all have high amounts of processed starches and sugars (and yes, I know they are usually around the firehouse).

Here's why sugary foods are bad for you. First, if you eat a little sugar, you crave a bunch more. Sugar also triggers the body to store more fat. There has been lots of research coming out lately that has linked most of the illnesses we see today (including cancer, disease, etc.) to excessive sugar intake. Choose foods with the least amount of sugar, if a product has more than 10 grams per serving and no fiber, put it back.



Tips to Reduce Your Sugar Intake

- This sounds obvious but the first and best thing you can do is make some conscious efforts to just eat less sugar: reduce cakes, cookies, sugary cereals, desserts, etc.
- Find the hidden sugars. Read labels, sugar is hidden, and it often replaces fat in low-fat/fat-free foods and you'll find it in things that can really be made from just a few ingredients like nut butters, breads and salad dressings. Check nutrition labels to help you pick the foods with less added sugar or go for the low-sugar version.
- Eat whole, real foods. This goes along with Step 2. If you have a sweet tooth, try satisfying your cravings with sweet foods like fruit. When you do eat packaged foods, check the ingredient list and know the various names for sugar so you can spot it in the foods you're eating. Remember that low fat/fat-free often means high sugar.
- Instead of sugary, fizzy drinks and juice drinks (soda), go for water. If you take sugar in hot drinks or add it to cereal, gradually reduce the amount until you can cut it out altogether!
- Reduce desserts either in frequency or amounts. It's alright to indulge occasionally, try to mind portion sizes when you do.
- Sweet Tea has a lot of sugar! Try to find some creative ways to make tea and/or find a healthy substitute like water.

Get educated, read labels, ask questions and [Click Here for a great post on "How to Reduce Sugar in \(and out\) of the Firehouse.](#)

Step 4. Plan, plan, plan and prepare meals.

This is such a huge part of staying on track when you are trying to eat clean. It's when life is busy, you're super hungry, and have nothing ready to eat... That's when bad decisions get made. We grab the less-than-nutritious processed foods because let's face it: they are quicker and easier. If you plan for those moments, you will be less tempted to eat the foods you are trying to avoid.

Preparing your own food makes it a lot easier to plan ahead, and that helps you control what you eat most of the time. If you spend one day preparing a week's worth of breakfasts, lunches and dinners, you won't need to think about your meals again till the next week.

I like to do my meal prep on Sunday or Monday night. I try to prepare some menu options and then cook up some healthy meals and put them in Tupperware for later in the week. I also like to have vegetables like carrots, celery and cucumbers sliced and some hummus ready for a quick snack. I truly believe that the best way to keep the food you eat healthy is to make it yourself. That's why I like to cook at home and at the firehouse. If preparing a full week of meals seems daunting, make lunch and dinner at home for the first 3 days and see how it goes!

Meal prep. Meal prep comes in many forms. Some like to cook the same meals for the entire week, while others will double what they cook for dinner to eat for meals the following day. No matter what your preference is, set yourself up on the right foot during a busy week and plan out your meals prior. If you choose to plan daily meals, at the beginning of the week decide on your proteins, vegetables, and starches. Grocery shop for the week when you've made your list and then decide the night before what you'll have the next day to ensure you have everything you need. Grilling chicken, beef, or fish is quick and requires little prep if you have a gas grill, roasting vegetables in the oven on broil with olive oil, salt and pepper can be done in 10 minutes, and potatoes in the microwave takes 3-4 minutes tops which can give you a full meal in under 30 minutes. Crockpot meals are also an excellent way to plan ahead and have leftovers for lunches or dinners the following days. Instapots or Air Fryers are extremely fast at making meals in no time as well. Make double or triple for dinner to ensure you have leftovers for meals the following day.



The key here is to plan for the week, so you have all the ingredients you need without having to make stops at the grocery store during the week. However, when "life happens" and you need to make a stop, whether you have kids in tow or not, investigate stores offering online ordering with curbside

pickup! This is a great way to cut time in the store (and unnecessary purchases). Some stores do not charge for this amenity either!

5. Find some healthy go to snacks (and have them handy).

In addition to preparing your meals at home, you need some go to nutrition for work and for the road. One of the reasons people fail to see results when they start a fitness program is because they do not keep their nutrition in check. The goal of the Tactical Fitness Team and the TAHPI Strong programs is to provide you with every resource possible to combat against all those excuses that have been holding you back. A big excuse for not eating healthy is not having good food choices around. Well, you no longer have that excuse!

Prepare your meals (step 4) then find some healthy snack to keep on hand. There is a “Healthy Snack Guide” available in Target Solutions, make sure you download and view that resource. Some athletes in the past have printed that out and used it as a reference when they were at the station or in their car. Some of the items on that list include nuts and seeds, dried fruit, or bars such as Kind bars and Rx Bars, essentially ones with minimal ingredients. If you’re traveling in your vehicle, more and more gas stations are offering healthier options to include Greek yogurt (low sugar), veggie and fruit packs, prepackaged salads, prepackaged hardboiled eggs, and nuts and seeds. When searching for a healthy snack always pair a carbohydrate and protein. For example, a piece of fruit with a plain Greek yogurt or 1 to 2 ounces of nuts with fruit is a great snack. Grabbing items with simple sugars such as candy bars and gummy candies provide no nutritional value leaving you hungry. If stopping at fast food restaurants, choose grilled items over fried and opt for the salad or fruit as a side.

One more point about snacking. I know that cakes, cookies, and baked goods are common around the firehouse (and a lot of houses). Remember this: Just because it’s there doesn’t mean you have to eat it! You can also do what I do when I enter the firehouse (maybe you can do this at your own



**Just because it's there doesn't
mean you have to eat it...**

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home) ... I take the baked goods and put them high in the cupboards, out of sight, out of mind. Use these snack options and plan for your nutrition success.

Bonus Step 6: Follow the 90% rule.

For 90% of the time you will follow these 5 steps to a tee. The other 10% I want you to cheat... Yep cheat. There are, however, some guidelines to the cheat meal (keep reading).

Now, you can get away with 80--90%. But, the closer to 90 or even 95% you get, the better the results. If you can follow your plan 90% of the time, you will soon see unwanted fat melt off your body. However, if you find yourself breaking these rules more than 75 to 80% of the time, your chances of failing increase significantly. Just saying...

Here is the catch about eating a cheat meal. Make sure you do the math and determine what 10% of the time really means. For example, if you're eating 4 meals/snacks per day for 7 days of the week – that's 28 meals a week. 10% of 28 meals is about 2 or 3 meals. Therefore, you're allowed to "break the rules" 2 or 3 meals each week (I would prefer 2).

Don't binge — schedule! Your 10% meals shouldn't include downing an entire pizza, followed by a full box of Krispy Kreme donuts. Binge eating can rapidly destroy your progress and make you feel like crap, let's be clear on that. And, a day long binge is not the equivalent of "one cheat meal." Rather, your 10% meals should include some foods, in reasonable quantities, that might not normally fit into your plan.

This might include a couple slices of pizza on a Saturday evening, and maybe a beer or glass of wine Wednesday, or some chocolate on Monday morning. And, the best way to make sure you don't go overboard is to schedule your 10% meals. I suggest that you pick a day and a meal and schedule it just like you'll be scheduling your exercise days. This will keep you committed to your eating plan as well as have you looking forward to something different.

I know these can help, take control of your nutrition and start eating like a Fire Rescue Athlete! Consume whole foods that are high in fiber and low in sugar, such as lean protein sources (lean beef, chicken, fish, and whey protein), fruits & vegetables (oranges, apples, strawberries, blueberries, broccoli, peppers, asparagus, carrots, cauliflower), nuts (almonds, sunflower seeds, & walnuts), and whole grains (quinoa, and tubers). Plan for success and follow these steps 90% of the time.



Additional Resources

Here are some great additional resources to learn more about nutrition and supplementation for the Fire Rescue Athlete.

Some information on Supplements

Most nutritionist do believe that you can get the required nutrients with diet alone, but it is difficult, especially when you're working long shifts and busy. For most of us (especially in the fire service) supplements may be a useful way to help get the valuable nutrients we need. With that in mind, there are 3 basic supplements that I use and would recommend to help fill any nutritional gaps in your diet.

- The first is a [multi-vitamin](#) or a "green" food supplement.
- The second is a [protein supplement](#).
- The third is a [fish oil supplement](#).
- (Bonus)- [Sleep aid supplement](#)

Precision Nutrition (I am Precision Nutrition Certified; I highly recommend their programs):

- [How to Fix Your Diet](#)
- [Calorie Control Guide](#)

Here is a great post about some foods that will help combat the number one killer of firefighters.
[4 foods that help firefighters combat heart disease...](#)

Healthy Nutrition Tips for the Firehouse (or any house).

<https://firerescuefitness.com/2018/05/healthy-nutrition-tips-for-the-firehouse-or-any-house/>

If you drink soda, this will hopefully help you stop...

<https://firerescuefitness.com/2016/03/firehouse-nutrition-diet-soda-bad/>

Here are some great rules for Firefighter Fat Loss. Some of them are covered in the materials listed above but there are several tips to help you get leaner.

<https://firerescuefitness.com/2018/02/10-simple-rules-firefighter-fat-loss-2018-edition/>