

# Unhealthy eating: a new form of occupational hazard?

December 27 2011

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The poor diet of shift workers should be considered a new occupational health hazard, according to an editorial published in this month's *PLoS Medicine*. The editorial draws on previous work published in the journal, which showed an association between an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and rotating patterns of shift work in US nurses.

Shift work is now a very common pattern of work in both the developed and developing world, with around 15-20% of the working population in Europe and the US engaged in shift work. It is particularly prevalent in the health care industry. [Shift work](#) is notoriously associated with poor patterns of eating, which is exacerbated by easier access to junk food compared with more healthy options.

The editors argue that working patterns should now be considered a specific risk factor for obesity and type 2 diabetes, which are currently at [epidemic proportions](#) in the developed world and likely to become so soon in the less-developed world. They go on to suggest that firm action is needed to address this epidemic, i.e. that "governments need to legislate to improve the habits of consumers and take specific steps to ensure that it is easier and cheaper to eat healthily than not". More specifically, they suggest that unhealthy eating could legitimately be considered a new form of occupational hazard and that workplaces, specifically those who employ shift workers, should lead the way in eliminating this hazard.

**More information:** The *PLoS Medicine* Editors (2011) Poor Diet in

Shift Workers: A New Occupational Health Hazard? PLoS Med 8(12):  
e1001152. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001152](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001152)

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Citation: Unhealthy eating: a new form of occupational hazard? (2011, December 27) retrieved  
24 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-12-unhealthy-occupational-hazard.html>

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