

*Nutritional wellness for first responders is essential for maintaining physical energy, mental clarity, and long-term health. Given the demanding and irregular nature of the job, proper nutrition helps optimize performance, enhance resilience, and prevent burnout.*

*A balanced diet with lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats supports endurance, alertness, and recovery. Hydration is also key to maintaining cognitive function and overall health during long shifts and stressful situations.*



### **Indicators of Poor Nutrition**

- Strong cravings for salty or sweet snacks/junk foods or fast foods
- Fatigue and low energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor sleep quality
- Weight fluctuations and digestive issues
- Decreased physical performance
- Mood swings, increased irritability, stress, or anxiety

For more resources on wellness, visit our website



[vafirstresponderwellness.org/resources](http://vafirstresponderwellness.org/resources)

# NUTRITIONAL WELLNESS

## What does it mean?

### **Balanced Diet**

Consuming a variety of nutrient-rich foods, such as lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats, helps fuel the body and maintain energy levels throughout demanding shifts.

### **Mindful Eating**

Taking time to eat mindfully, even during busy shifts, helps prevent overeating, supports digestion, and ensures proper fuel is consumed for optimal performance.

### **Adequate Hydration**

Staying well-hydrated is crucial for mental clarity, physical performance, and overall health, particularly during long hours or physically demanding tasks.

### **Meal Planning**

Preparing healthy, portable meals and snacks ahead of time helps ensure access to nutritious options during unpredictable shifts and avoid unhealthy eating habits on the go.

### **Stress Management Through Nutrition**

Foods rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants can help manage stress and improve mood, supporting mental well-being in high-pressure situations.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

**Scan for more information**  
[vafirstresponderwellness.org/about-us](http://vafirstresponderwellness.org/about-us)



## CONTACT US

**Chris Scuderi**  
*Public Safety and Law Enforcement Training Coordinator*  
(804) 278-7054

**Marc Dawkins**  
*Law Enforcement and Public Safety Training Manager*  
(804) 380-9709

**Email us at:**  
[vafirstresponderwellness@dcjs.virginia.gov](mailto:vafirstresponderwellness@dcjs.virginia.gov)

## NUTRITIONAL WELLNESS *(cont.)*

### Strategies For Enhancing Nutritional Wellness

#### Plan and Prepare Meals

Set aside time to prepare balanced meals and snacks that are easy to grab and eat on the go. Include nutrient-rich foods like lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables to maintain energy and focus throughout the day. Not sure where to start? Pick one meal, like lunch, to prepare for your week.

#### Limit Processed Foods and Prioritize Balanced Meals

Limit processed and fast foods high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, which can cause energy crashes and health issues. Focus on meals with protein, healthy fats, and complex carbs to stabilize blood sugar, boost your mood, and sustain your energy.

#### Eat Regularly and Pack Healthy Snacks

Eat regular meals or snacks to maintain energy and avoid overeating. Keep portable options like nuts, protein bars, or fruit on hand to make healthy choices during breaks.

#### Utilize Recovery Nutrition

After physically demanding shifts, focus on eating protein- and carbohydrate-rich meals or snacks to aid in muscle recovery, reduce fatigue, and replenish energy stores.

#### Focus on Hydration and Avoid Caffeine Overload

Limit excessive caffeine intake, especially in the afternoon, to avoid disrupting sleep and maintain steady energy levels. Carrying a water bottle and drinking water regularly during shifts supports focus, performance, and overall health.

*Note: This information is provided in collaboration with NOTA Fitness.*