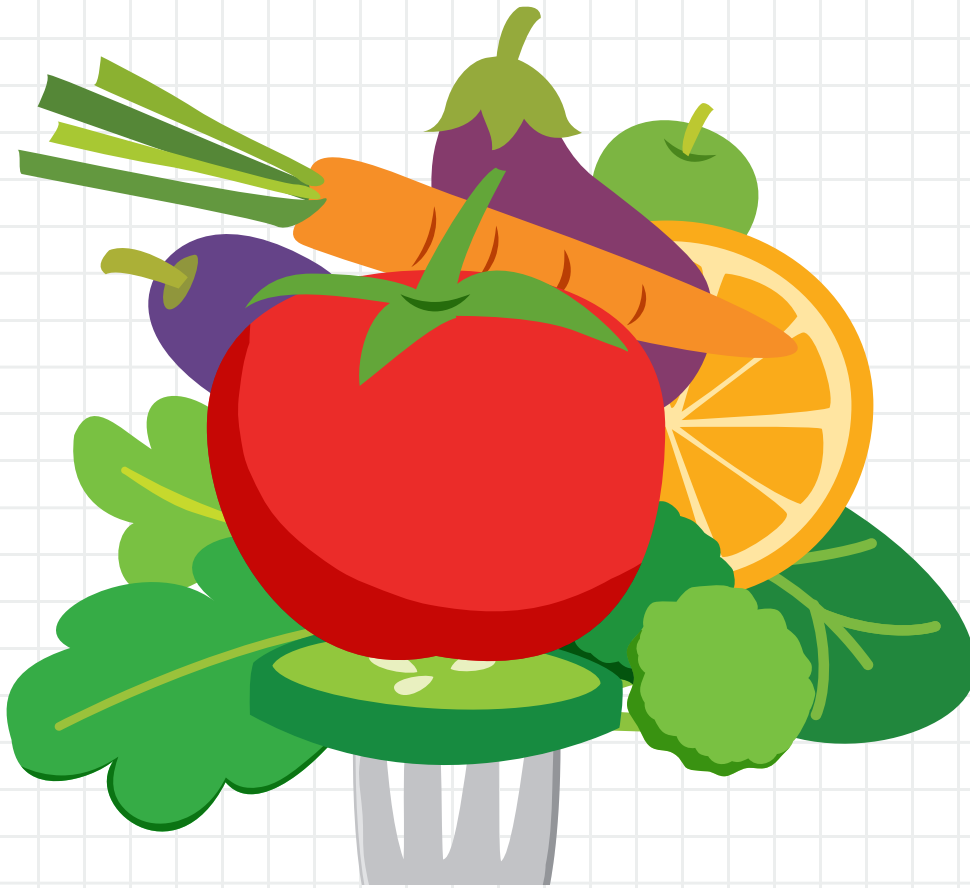


Firefighter FITNESS: Fit to Serve, Fit for Life

2026 FIREFIGHTER
SAFETY
STAND DOWN



FIREFIGHTER NUTRITION



WEDNESDAY: FIREFIGHTER NUTRITION

Fueling the Job and Protecting Long-Term Health

Firefighting requires high physical output in unpredictable, high-risk environments. While we rely on external PPE to protect us from hazards we can see, **nutrition is our INTERNAL PPE** – protecting us from the threats we can't.

Every shift exposes firefighters to:

- Extreme physical demands
- Toxic environments
- Increased risk of **cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic inflammation**

We can't completely eliminate those exposures – but we can control how prepared our bodies are to handle them. And nutrition plays a key part.

Bottom line:

👉 *What you eat directly impacts how you perform today – and whether you stay healthy long enough to finish your career.*

Why Nutrition Matters

High Physical Demand Occupation

Fire suppression can push firefighters to:

- **80–100% max heart rate**
- Near maximal oxygen consumption

When these demands aren't matched with proper fueling:

- Fatigue sets in faster
- Decision-making declines
- Injury risk increases

Elevated Health Risks

Firefighters face increased risk of:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Metabolic syndrome
- Certain cancers

Proper nutrition helps:

- Reduce inflammation
- Improve cholesterol
- Support immune function
- Maintain healthy body composition

👉 *You clean your gear after a fire, nutrition helps clean the inside.*

Key Concepts for Nutrition

Firefighters must fuel for three priorities:

- **Performance** → energy for the job
- **Recovery** → rebuild between calls
- **Prevention** → protect long-term health

Firefighters run on three fuel sources:

- **Carbohydrates** → **Fuel**
- **Protein** → **Repair**
- **Fats** → **Sustain**

When properly balanced, these support:

- Sustained performance
- Cardiac health
- Cancer risk reduction
- Metabolic health

Start viewing food as fuel for **performance, prevention, and longevity**—not just calories.

👉 *Build every plate like it's protecting your career – because it is.*

Fueling the Firefighter: Understanding Macronutrients

Carbohydrates → Fuel

Primary energy source for high-intensity work:

- Advancing hose lines
- Climbing stairs
- Victim rescue

Sources:

Fruit, rice, potatoes, oats, whole grains

👉 *Carbs are your air supply – don't run out mid-call.*

Protein → Repair

Supports:

- Muscle recovery
- Immune function
- Injury prevention

Sources:

Chicken, lean beef, fish, eggs, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese

👉 *Protein is your repair crew – keep it staffed.*

👉 *This is part of your INTERNAL PPE – repairing what you can't see.*

Fats → Sustain

Supports:

- Hormone function
- Brain health
- Long-lasting energy

Sources:

Olive oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, fatty fish

Vegetables → Protect

Critical for:

- Cancer prevention
- Cardiac health
- Inflammation control

Sources:

Leafy greens, broccoli, peppers, carrots, mixed vegetables

👉 *Vegetables aren't garnish – they're protection.*

👉 *This is your daily cancer defense system.*

HOW MUCH: Firefighter Portion Guide (Palm/Hand Method)

On a busy shift, you don't have time to weigh or track food. This is your on-the-fly fueling tool.

Use your hand as your guide:

- **Protein = 1 palm**
- **Carbohydrates = 1 cupped hand**
- **Fats = 1 thumb**

- **Vegetables = 1–2 fists**

Why This Works for Firefighters

- **Always available** → no measuring tools needed
- **Scales to your body** → your hand size fits your needs
- **Built for consistency** → simple enough to use every shift

Starting Point (Per Meal)

- **Men:** 2 palms protein, 2 fists vegetables, 2 cupped hands carbs, 2 thumbs fats
- **Women:** 1 palm protein, 1 fist vegetables, 1 cupped hand carbs, 1 thumb fats

Adjust for Workload

- Heavy fire/training day → increase carbs
- Slower shift → slightly reduce carbs
- Keep protein and vegetables consistent

👉 *Fuel for the workload, not just the clock.*

Key Nutrition Strategies for Firefighters

1. Fuel Performance

- Eat balanced meals with carbs, protein, and fats.
- Don't start the shift under-fueled.

2. Prioritize Recovery

- Include protein in every meal.
- Refuel after high-exertion calls.

3. Control Inflammation

- Prioritize fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats.
- Limit ultra-processed foods.

4. Build Balanced Meals

Example:

- Grilled chicken (protein)
- Rice or potatoes (carbs)
- Vegetables (fiber + nutrients)
- Olive oil or avocado (fats)

5. Plan for the Shift

- Prep meals ahead of time.
- Keep healthy snacks available.
- Set up the station for success.

👉 *If your plan only works on slow days, it's not a real plan.*

HYDRATION: The Most Overlooked Piece of INTERNAL PPE

Hydration is critical for:

- Performance
- Safety
- Recovery

Firefighters operate in:

- High heat
- Encapsulating PPE
- Extended operations

This leads to rapid fluid loss – often before you feel it.

Even mild dehydration can cause:

- Decreased cognitive function
- Slower reaction time
- Increased cardiac strain
- Reduced physical performance

On the fireground, that means:

- Slower decisions
- Faster fatigue
- Increased heat illness risk

👉 *If you're waiting until you're thirsty, you're already behind.*

Practical Hydration Strategies

Start Hydrated

- Begin every shift with water, not caffeine.

Hydrate Consistently

- Drink throughout the shift.
- Don't rely on "catching up" later.

Match Intake to Workload

- Increase fluids during fires, training, and heat.
- Use electrolytes when sweating heavily.

Build Simple Habits

- 1 glass of water before each meal
- 1 glass of water per cup of coffee
- Carry a water bottle at all times.

Hydration Bottom Line

- Supports performance, heart health, and recovery

👉 *Water is your simplest performance enhancer.*

👉 *Hydration is part of your INTERNAL PPE.*

Put This Into Practice

Start today with one or a few of these strategies:

- Choose healthier options for station rec funds.
 - Oatmeal, olive oil for cooking and salad dressings, peanut butter, eggs, prepacked mixed nuts, individual Greek yogurts, dried fruit, applesauce packets, pretzels, Clif or Fig bars
- Swap out traditional firehouse treats with other options.
 - Flavored waters for dinner, fruit bowls (strawberries, blueberries, etc.), bag of coffee beans, air popped popcorn
- Meal prep before shifts.
 - Prep cooked chicken, cut up veggies, and other favorites so they are readily available when meal time comes.
- Pack balanced snacks.
 - Greek yogurt with nuts, string cheese and turkey deli meat, apple with nut butter and cup of cottage cheese
- Stay hydrated throughout the shift by keeping a large water bottle with you at all times. Keep some ORS (oral rehydration solutions) with you at all times (DripDrop, Liquid IV, FLUID)
- Add more water throughout the day.
 - Drink 1 large glass of water before each meal. For every cup of coffee, drink 1 glass of water. Consider sports or electrolyte drinks before/after heavy training and especially after bouts of any activity that amounts to sweat loss.
- Fuel your workouts and training with simple carbohydrates.
 - Try applesauce packets, fruit, fruit bars, cereal, uncrustables, fruit snacks, pretzels, dried fruits, fig bars, Clif bars.
- Build your balanced dinner plate using your hand as your guide.

Small changes, done consistently, lead to:

- Better performance
- Faster recovery
- Long-term health protection

Final Message

- **Performance** → **Fuel properly**
- **Prevention** → **Eat whole foods**
- **Longevity** → **Stay consistent**

👉 Your external PPE protects you on scene.

👉 Your nutrition is your INTERNAL PPE.

Additional Resources

[Precise Nutrition Hand Portion Method](#)

[National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Center for Firefighter Safety, Health, and Well-being](#)

[When Healthy Eating Stops Feeling Healthy](#)

[International Association of Fire Fighters Nutrition Resources](#)

[CRACKYL Magazine: 6 Keys to Performance Nutrition for Firefighters](#)

Disclaimer: The information and resources presented in this document are for informational purposes only. They are not intended to offer a diagnosis or treatment of any health issue. Consult a healthcare professional if you feel you may be experiencing a health issue or for any questions you may have. This document does not provide a comprehensive listing of resources that are available.

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