

Food vs fatigue on board

in [Analysis & Opinions](#) 11 April 2017



In the following article, David Steele, Director of the Food Inspection Training, explains how food plays a huge part in a seafarer's life on board and gives his advice on the proper meals for seafarers in order to avoid fatigue during duty.

There have been some case studies recently to find out several reasons why seafarers show signs of fatigue on board ships, whether this be small coastal ships to larger ocean going container and bulk carriers, etc. Many different scenarios have been thrown into the basket, from passage times, to length of tour, different cultures and other reasons.

At Food Inspection Training, Ltd, we specialize in looking at the standard of catering, food management, food hygiene practices and good quality balanced menus to cater for the crew on board in real time; that could be mixed crew nationalities/ cultures, to all crew from one country. From my personal point of view over the years since the formation of Food Inspection Training, Ltd (F.I.T) and clocking up many thousands of sea miles travelling with different companies, nationalities, cultures, etc. food plays a huge part in a seafarer's life on board.

Since the implementation of the MLC 2006, in August 2013, the ship-owners and the respective crew/training agencies have been slow in putting into place the basic needs of training for the Ship's Cook of today. The Flag and Port States also should accept some blame for not carrying out proper checks on board that the Ship's Cook is really up to the new standards that are now associated with his/her role on board. The Ship's Cook today must understand the values of producing nutritional meals for all on board.

I recall a few years back on board a gas tanker travelling from Singapore to UAE, a 3rd Engineer fainting in the engine room, a very serious incident. After looking into the cause, it was clearly down to diet and fatigue and cultural reasons. It happened over Ramadan and the Arab crew members had been fasting during the hours of daylight and the Indian cooks had not taken this

period into consideration. After a talk with the Arab crew and the Indian cooks I suggested that for the rest of Ramadan a diet of high carbohydrate and protein should be served to the crew to help their bodies gain the fuel to carry them through to the next meal time, problem solved.

Menu Fatigue

Another area that I have always tried to insist on, is a healthy balanced, well thought out menu cycle, to help do away with what we call “Menu Fatigue”. It’s important that a menu doesn’t repeat itself too often, to the point that the crew know what day of the week it is, by what is being served to them. Don’t get me wrong there is no problem with having a Roast dinner every Sunday or having Steak and chips every Saturday, or some family favorites once a week, but the rest of the daily menu over a month should be different. So when ordering the rations, don’t forget to ask your supplier have they any offers, “one of recipes” to try something new, surprise the crew, involve the crew !!! Then you will have a contented crew.

The Forgotten Meal

At the beginning of the day, most people dash off to work or school without a thought to their body’s dietary needs. Who has time to eat in the morning anyway?

“Breakfast is an easy meal to forget. But if people are skipping breakfast and find they’re tired by midmorning, then it’s time to re-evaluate that habit.” We all know that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A Recent experiment showed that “Breakfast skippers” are on average 7% less productive during morning work session than breakfast eaters.

Research shows breakfast improves alertness and concentration, helps shed pounds by preventing overeating during the day, and prevents

- obesity,
- diabetes,
- heart disease.

(All above are now a big concern for Filipino health, as there has been a significant rise in repatriation costs to the ship-owner and agencies).

To get these benefits and to prepare the body for the day, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends eating carbohydrates for energy and protein for endurance. Some quick options include:

- Whole grain bagel with cheese
- Cereal with fruit and yogurt
- Whole grain toast with peanut butter and fruit
- Hard-boiled egg sliced into a whole wheat pita
- Scrambled eggs, toast, and fruit
- Oatmeal with raisins

For the really busy, breakfast bars, frozen omelets, breakfast sandwiches, oatmeal packets, and whole grain cereals in prepackaged plastic bowls are good choices for eating on the go. Be mindful, though, of the sugar and fat content of your morning meal.

Foods to Fight Fatigue

Although carbohydrates have gotten a bad reputation, the nutrient is still the body's preferred source of energy. Low-carb diets, initially boost energy but deplete it in the long run.

The best way to maximize the body's potential for energy is to eat a combination of complex and simple carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates, which are slow burning, should make up the bulk of the carbohydrates we eat. Whole grains and starchy vegetables such as potatoes, squash, pumpkin, and carrots fall into this category; how many of these ingredients would you find for example on a ship crewed by Filipinos. Many processed carbohydrates, such as white rice, white bread, and pasta, contain little or no fiber, resulting in expending energy at a rapid rate.

This does not mean ignoring simple carbohydrates with a faster burn, such as those found in fruits, vegetables, and honey. They can provide an immediate source of energy.

Simple sugars found in candy bars, soft drinks, and cookies can also provide a quick boost, but then a big letdown afterwards.

What I also see on board many ships are huge quantities of fruit juices. Not the fresh kind, but long life juices that really contain so much sugar it's unbelievable. What good are these doing? A while back, again on a gas tanker, I recall the Indian Captain would only allow good quality orange juice on board, and supplied bottled water to the crew; there had to be Wholegrain rice served at least three days per week and fresh bread, white and wholegrain, baked every day. This was a proactive Captain who understood what an important role a healthy diet meant for his crew.

Dehydration is one of the leading causes of a lack of energy. If you're not well hydrated, your body puts its resources into maintaining your water balance instead of into giving you energy. Everyone's water needs vary. In February 2004, the Institute of Medicine released a report indicating most people meet their daily hydration needs by using thirst as their guide. In general, the Institute's expert panel recommended that women get about 11 cups of water from food and drink each day, and men get about 16 cups daily. This may seem like a lot of liquid, but 20% of it comes from food and the other 80% from drinking water and other beverages.

To adequately get your hydration needs, particularly on a hot and humid day, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics suggests carrying around a bottle of water, or replacing your afternoon soft drink with water. Frozen juice bars or icy treats are also a good idea.

Water is especially important after exercise, with certain medicines, and with a high-fiber diet. Your fluid intake should be adjusted to how much water you're losing, "A simple thing like stopping at a drinking fountain when you walk by one is a good idea.

Engineers

There is a direct link to repatriation and Genitourinary issues for Engineers who deliberately don't keep adequately hydrated, (Should there be a supply of small bottles of water supplied)? Is there a need when ships are being built, that a toilet in the engine is a must? Is it not time the Naval architects take simple things like this into consideration.

Going back in time again to ship's design, I remember asking a COO of a major shipping company, at the time of building a new ship, what would it cost to put a toilet in the galley for the galley team only, so that we can help avoid cross-contamination between other crew members, I was told by this COO, at the time of build," the cost would be nothing, then the sentence was finished by saying, show me anywhere that says I have to provide this".

Coffee Time

The effect of caffeine varies from person to person. Some people need a few cups before experiencing stimulation; others feel shaky or jittery with one serving.

Caffeine can also interfere with sleep, particularly if it is consumed in the late afternoon. The lack of “shuteye” could obviously affect one’s energy level. To resolve this issue, it is recommended switching to decaffeinated beverages by about 3 p.m. It is also suggested that gradually cutting back on caffeinated drinks, especially since they may have a dehydrating effect.

Beating the Doldrums

Food can raise or diminish your body’s energy levels. If you are eating healthily and are still tired, try changing the frequency of your meals. Some people find they get more of a boost with several small meals throughout the day, while others prefer the concept of three square meals daily. There’s no right or wrong way, as everyone’s energy needs differ.

Food Poisoning

This is another area that the ordinary seaman doesn’t fully understand and when a F.I.T. consultant visits on board, he also spends a short period of time explaining good hygiene and housekeeping to the crew as a whole and why these are important.

Let’s face it when we have food poisoning it generally comes with the usual symptoms, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea and who wants to tell anyone about this; it’s a very private personal and sometimes embarrassing.

I normally start this presentation by asking the crew “who has had food poisoning”, and generally no hands will come up, so then I ask how many have had sore stomachs, eventually the hands will start to rise, then I ask has anyone had diarrhea, and the rest of the hands will be put into the air. This is when the crew clicks that they have had food poisoning at some time in their life. Usually they say not on this ship, but a previous ship or after eating something on shore leave, etc. Food poisoning is very hard on your body, through dehydration and the lack of being able to eat to provide the body with energy. This is why it’s important for deck crew and watchkeepers to inform the Captain of these symptom’s as it can really affect your performance and concentration levels.

This is just a short explanation on why Fatigue on board a ship or a place of work, where food and diet plays an important factor on health and well-being.

Moreover, how many Risk Assessments are carried out these days on all work places and practices to make sure our working environment is safe. Yet I have never seen a Risk Assessment being done on Food and Diet and the affects it has on how a person thinks or carries out his daily duties!

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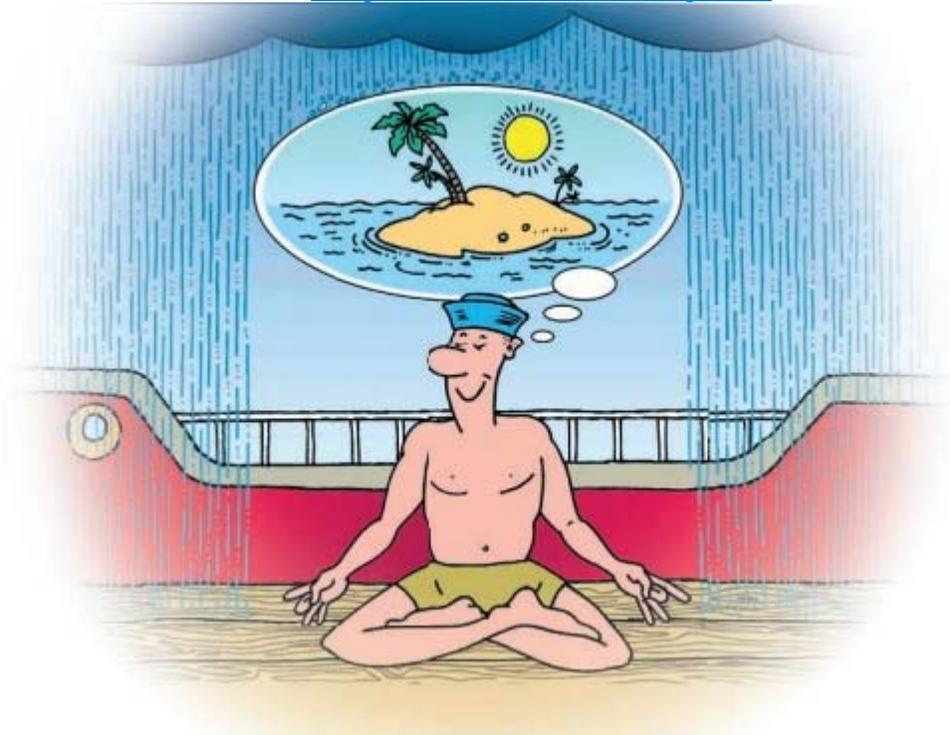
David Steele is the Director of the Food Inspection Training, which performs onboard audits and training, food management and menu costing. David has over 30 years experience in the catering industry, having trained as a chef in the British Army to the highest standards. His company, with the maritime market and the introduction of the MLC 2006 Standard A3.2 Food & Catering, aims to introduce food and catering management systems to world recognised standards (HACCP).

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