5 Tips for Healthier Eating at Work

Don't let poor eating habits stand in the way of health, productivity and morale.

BY DAWID WIACEK

Respect Lunchtime

Don't be a mealtime martyr. "I didn't have time to eat" may sound like a badge of honor to some, but it's problematic on at least two counts: first, it suggests poor time management skills and, sadly, it shows a basic disregard for the fact that you need to eat well to live and operate at your optimal level. Your body and brain need a robust and regular dose of nutrients to keep your decision-making abilities, alertness and focus sharp. If at all possible, block out 30 minutes on your schedule every day for lunch, and your colleagues won't unknowingly schedule meetings during that time. There will always be exceptions, sure -- just don't let starvation be the rule.

BYOL: Bring Your Own Lunch

Even if you're not a world-class chef, bringing your own lunch to work is the way to go. Not only is it significantly more economical (do you know how much you spend on lunch each year?), but it's typically much healthier – plus, it's a chance to impress your colleagues and a great way to reduce leftover spoilage in the fridge at home. If you don't have the time or desire to cook for yourself, consider asking your partner, your kids, or even a willing and able neighbor – perhaps for a small fee. You'll still come out ahead fiscally.

It's a Work Desk, Not a Dining Table

The Oxford English dictionary added the phrase "al desko" in 2014. Sadly, eating lunch at one's desk is the norm at many offices, even ones that have cafeterias or ample outdoor seating (weather permitting). Eating alone in front of the computer screen is an example of multi-tasking at its worst: chances are you're not fully enjoying your meal or chewing it properly, and you're also not fully processing the emails or work tasks you're trying to complete at the same time.

Less, More Often

You are not a machine, but rather a living, breathing human being. Unlike your computer, which can run for hours without a pause, you should consider taking regular breaks from your work to keep your concentration sharp and your creative juices flowing. The act of walking to the office kitchen or pantry gets you up from your desk and moving (an added health benefit if your job is sedentary). Plus, the snack will boost your energy and mood, so when you return to your desk, you'll be ready to continue the task at hand. Just avoid the hidden sugars; opt for water or tea in place of juice, which typically comes saturated with sugar – empty calories. Nuts and whole fruits are also a great snack, depending on dietary restrictions and personal preferences. Most experts agree: eat less, more often. Spacing out your snacks in small increments keeps your energy level optimal without overwhelming your digestive system or spiking your blood sugar levels.

Friday Fundays

Although homemade lunches are ideal, it's a good thing to get out of the office once in a while. If there's one day a week when your workload calms down a bit (e.g. Friday) consider heading out for lunch with a coworker or your department. This will be great for team-building, and you'll get to try a new restaurant. It's also a great networking opportunity if you invite colleagues you may not know well, or who work in other departments: you'll learn about their hidden talents and hobbies, you'll hear about important company projects, job openings, promotions, and other goings on. And you may make a long-lasting friend.

Photo by Dawid Wiacek