

Eating Well at Work – A Guide for Employees

INTRODUCTION

You spend a large percentage of your time at work, eating at least one main meal here, sometimes more. It's simple — if you don't eat well at work, you're going to run into trouble.

This document has been prepared to provide you with some easy to follow tips for eating well at work and avoiding the traps that lead to bad eating habits. The resource section at the end of this document provides website links to more information on nutrition, healthy eating guidelines and physical activity.

Why eating well at work is important

In general, eating well helps keep you healthy in many ways, including:

- ✓ increasing your energy levels
- ✓ increasing your ability to concentrate
- ✓ helping to reduce body fat and avoid unwanted weight gain
- ✓ helping you to stay in shape as you get older
- ✓ supporting your immune system and helping you recover from illness quicker
- ✓ improving your digestion and bowel function
- ✓ reducing your chances of developing diet related conditions such as diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. If you have one of these diet related conditions, then eating well will help you manage it better.

Why it's not so easy to eat well at work

- ✗ Long working hours and stress can lead to bad habits such as eating on the run or at your desk.
- ✗ Busy work schedules often mean we reach for the less healthy convenient options.
- ✗ Catering options at meetings and events usually provide few healthy choices.
- ✗ Vending machines are often stocked with unhealthy choices.
- ✗ Cafeterias often lack appealing, affordable and tasty food choices based on vegetables and fruit.
- ✗ Fundraising chocolates in the staff room are too tempting.
- ✗ There is limited access to fresh or filtered water.
- ✗ Shift work can play havoc with your metabolism and appetite, and there is often limited or no availability of healthy food.
- ✗ Self-service facilities can lead to overeating of higher fat, higher kilojoule foods and unwanted weight gain.
- ✗ Frequent travelling for work can result in a reliance on takeaway foods that are high in fat, kilojoules and sugar.

Just one of these factors can lead to a pattern of overeating of high fat, high sugar and high kilojoule foods. This can lead to unwanted weight gain, high blood fats and cholesterol, high blood pressure and other chronic disease risk factors.

HOW TO EAT BETTER AT WORK

Plan to eat well at work by recognising and avoiding those factors that make it hard for you to eat well. Here are some goals that may be relevant for you.

Eat well

- ✓ Eat a balanced diet that's high in fibre, with lots of wholegrain bread and cereals, nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables.
- ✓ Don't eat at your desk — try to eat in a nice eating area (e.g. the lunchroom or outside).
- ✓ Eat slowly and take time to enjoy your meal.
- ✓ Eat breakfast to keep your energy levels up and prevent a mid-morning slump.

Be prepared

- ✓ Make extra serves when preparing a meal the night before and take the leftovers for lunch.
- ✓ Keep the makings of a meal in your desk drawer; try small tins of baked beans, tinned fish, canned or carton soups and low-fat wholegrain crackers.
- ✓ Store tubs of low-fat yoghurt, fresh fruit, raw vegetables, cottage or ricotta cheese, and low-fat dips (such as hommus) in the fridge, and a loaf of wholegrain bread in the freezer.

Plan ahead with snacks

Workplace fundraising boxes and vending machines are often stocked with high kilojoule foods that have very little health benefit. To help you avoid the temptation, keep your desk or car packed with portable, healthy snacks such as:

- ✓ canned fruit
- ✓ low-fat muesli bars
- ✓ low-fat whole grain crackers
- ✓ rice cakes
- ✓ dried fruit
- ✓ cereal packets and small packs of UHT low-fat milk.

Be active

- ✓ Use the stairs instead of lifts
- ✓ Get up and walk to your colleague's desk rather than just emailing them
- ✓ Try to walk or cycle to work at least a couple of times a week (or if you live too far away, get out at lunchtimes).

If you are a shift worker:

- ✓ Aim to eat three meals a day with two or three snacks as needed.
- ✓ Eat your main meal before starting work.
- ✓ Eat lightly between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- ✓ Avoid a large meal straight before going to bed, instead make it a light meal such as a sandwich, cereal and fruit or a bowl of soup.
- ✓ Avoid fatty, greasy and spicy foods.
- ✓ Avoid or stop drinking alcohol, and avoid caffeine at least six hours before the time you want to fall asleep.

GOAL SETTING

Step 1: Set yourself a goal for the week and monitor how you are going. For example:

- **Week 1 goal 1:** Bring in low-fat afternoon tea at least three days this week.
- **Week 1 goal 2:** Don't eat lunch at desk – eat it in the tearoom or outside.

Step 2: Gradually bring in other goals you want to achieve. Don't forget to keep going with your earlier goals too. Some examples of new goals might be:

- **Week 2 goal 3:** Buy a multigrain chicken and salad roll with no butter at least twice.
- **Week 2 goal 4:** Drink at least one litre of water per day (water bottle on desk).

Keep a record of how you are going. For example:

Goal/ behaviour change	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	comment
Week 1						
1. Bring in afternoon tea	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	Forgot Thurs
2. Eat lunch outside	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Week 2						
1. Bring in afternoon tea	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	Forgot Tues
2. Eat lunch outside	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	Too busy
3. Chicken + salad roll	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	Function on Mon
4. Drink one litre+ water per day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Step 3: Involve your colleagues in eating well at work and being more physically active. For example:

- Arrange for a bowl of fruit to be beside the fundraising chocolates, so people have a choice when the mid-afternoon munchies hit.
- Better still, ask those who bring in the fundraising chocolates to consider healthier fundraising alternatives.
- Team up with a buddy for a lunchtime walk.

Step 4: Keep it up!

- Keep monitoring your goal for at least six weeks.
- Check again at three months and six months to see if you have maintained these healthier behaviours.

RESOURCES

These websites provide great information to help you with your healthy lifestyle plan.

Eat Well Tasmania
www.eatwelltas.org.au

Community Nutrition Unit, Department of Health & Human Services
www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition

Nutrition Australia
www.nutritionaustralia.org

Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)
Smart eating section www.daa.asn.au

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm

Dietary Guidelines for Australians
www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm

Daily Intake Guide
Published by the Australian Food and Grocery Council
www.mydailyintake.net

Physical Activity guidelines
www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/portal-Physical%20activity

Premier's Physical Activity Council (Tasmania)
www.getmoving.tas.gov.au

Healthy@Work
Workplace health and wellbeing program information for Tasmanian State Service agencies and employees www.healthyatwork.tas.gov.au



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