

Making nutrition work for any work scenario

Do you feel a twinge of guilt when you sneak off to the local fast food joint for a cheap and fast lunch? You know the extra fat and calories aren't the best choices you can make, but who has time to make a healthy lunch before work? Even if you work from home, unhealthy choices often beat out healthy ones because it's faster to zap a frozen burrito than to cook a meal from scratch. Though making nutrition work at work does require a conscious effort, making healthier choices is both beneficial and easier than you may think.

Skipping lunch is not an option

Many workers find it a challenge to take time during the workday to recharge. Almost [one third of workers](#) reported taking less than half an hour for lunch. Another 16 per cent said they work through their lunch hour while 10 per cent said that they never take a lunch break at all. Another 18 per cent eat their lunches at their desks or workspaces five days a week. Though skipping lunch is common, it shouldn't be an option. Skipping lunch may make you feel as though you're being productive, but it's more likely to be counterproductive.

Not only should you eat a healthy lunch for your physical well-being, you should take your full lunch break – away from your workspace – for your mental health. This is your time to refuel your body and re-energize your spirit. Try taking your full lunch break and eating healthy foods instead of junk for a full week and you'll likely find that you're more productive and happier as a result. By de-stressing at lunch, you'll be in a better position to give work your full attention when you're back on the clock.

Making healthy lunches work

In order to make nutrition work, identify the root cause behind your less healthy choices. If you work on a construction site, for example, there may not be a refrigerator or microwave available. If the lunchroom at your office is too cramped or you find the environment too work focused, you may think of a fast food run as a getaway. If you work at home, it may only take 10 minutes to heat and eat a frozen meal, so you gobble it up and log back into your computer.

Once you understand the reason for your choices, find alternatives. For example, you may need to buy insulated lunch containers or pack fresh foods that don't need to be refrigerated or heated. If you go out to lunch because it's a "getaway," find a nearby park, courtyard or other attractive public space and have a picnic lunch there. This will satisfy your urge to get out of the office while giving you the opportunity to take a healthy, relaxing break. If you often return to work early because you're a fast eater, change your lunch routine by adding a 20-minute walk around the block.

Finally, pack your own lunches and fill them with healthy items such as veggie sandwiches on whole grain bread, fruits, nuts, and lean protein. If you're typically pressed for time in the morning, try packing your lunch the night before or getting up 10 minutes earlier.

While convenience foods *are* convenient, they're not the best choice. You can make nutrition work, and you'll feel much better as a result.

Healthy snacks to keep on hand at work

Whether you work from home, at an office, on a job site, or on the road, you will get hungry at some point. When you do, you'll be more likely to make healthy choices if you have healthy options available. Make a point of keeping plenty of healthy snacks on hand and satisfying those cravings without guilt.

Here are a few great healthy snack ideas:

Nuts – Almonds, walnuts, peanuts and other nuts are delicious, loaded with protein and good fat, and highly portable. You can snack on nuts throughout the day, regardless of your work environment. However, because nuts are calorie dense, be careful not to overindulge. While you're at it, choose unsalted or low-salt nuts whenever possible.

Dried fruit – Raisins, dried cranberries, dried apples, dates, figs and other dried fruits are a tasty treat that should satisfy your sweet tooth and your hunger. Dried fruit also adds fiber to your diet, which can help you feel full and keep you regular.

Tuna – Snack size pouches of tuna and tuna salad kits are an excellent source of protein. They are also convenient and do not require refrigeration - though you'll need to remember to pack a spoon.

Peanut butter and crackers – Keep a jar of peanut butter and a box of crackers in your credenza or locker and enjoy a filling treat whenever hunger strikes. Peanut butter is also delicious with apples, celery, and carrots. Remember to watch your portions, because any nut butter is high in calories and fat.

Fresh fruit – Just as a bowl of fresh fruit at home is beautiful and inviting, the same is true of a bowl of fruit at the office. Let it serve as a visual reminder of your commitment to a healthier lifestyle, and indulge in a piece of juicy goodness whenever the mood strikes.

Dark chocolate – Yes, chocolate is good for you...in moderation. Flavanols found in cocoa beans have antioxidant effects and have been linked to lower blood pressure, improved vascular function, and a reduced risk of stroke, diabetes, and heart attack. When you're feeling stressed or hungry at work, try a small square of dark chocolate with an orange for an indulgent treat that's sure to lift your mood.

Low-fat yogurt – Greek yogurt is thick, creamy and loaded with calcium. Enjoy fruit-on-the-bottom style yogurt or try plain Greek yogurt as a dip for carrots, celery, and crackers.

Hummus – Hummus is a tasty spread made from chick peas, also called garbanzo beans. It's great for dipping your veggies into as well as with baked pita chips.

Cheese – With its fat and protein content, even a small portion of cheese can keep hunger pangs at bay – plus, it's loaded with calcium. Cheese sticks or individually wrapped cheese is an easy and convenient healthy snack.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help. You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at **1 800 387-4765** or visit workhealthlife.com.