

'Eat Smarter to Work Smarter' – How food can help you at work

Food not only provides us with nutrients, but also affects how our brains and bodies function, and how we feel and perform at work. For many of us our work is a major part of our lives, and while it is tempting just to grab whatever is to hand, thinking a little about what you choose to eat and drink during the working day could boost your performance and stamina. Eating well may need a little more planning, for example you may choose to bring one or two things in from home, but doesn't need to be expensive or time consuming. This factsheet will give you eating ideas to help you reach your potential and be 'Smarter at Work'.



Do you 'Eatwell'?

- Most of us believe that our diets are far healthier than they actually are
- We should all eat more fruits, vegetables and starchy carbohydrates, and less fatty and sugary foods
- The 'Eatwell' plate produced by the Food Standards Agency gives guidance on the ideal proportions of food in our diets. You can find out more about the plate on the www.eatwell.gov.uk.
- Try writing down everything you eat and drink over 2-3 days and see how it compares to the Eatwell plate



Boosting Breakfasts – the facts!

Eating breakfast is key to kick-starting our minds and bodies after a long night without food. People who eat breakfast regularly are found to have quicker reaction times, improved memory, and to perform better at a wide range of tasks than those who skip breakfast. Importantly for some of us, eating breakfast also improves mood in the mornings.



Missing breakfast is also a risk factor for weight gain, increasing the chances of overeating later in the day. If you leave home early plan ahead and take something with you. Choose a carbohydrate rich breakfast to provide the brain with an essential boost of blood sugar. Brain boosting breakfasts include:

- A bowl of cereal with milk – topped with fresh or dried fruit
- Toast and a banana
- A marmite sandwich with some fresh fruit
- A 'light' cream-cheese filled bagel and some dried fruit
- A pot of fruit yoghurt and some malt loaf with low-fat spread
- A home-made fruit & yoghurt 'smoothie' – whizz up and pop in a flask to take with you



Sustaining snacks

Boosting your energy levels with a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack may also improve your attention, motivation, confidence and mood. Starchy foods may help us cope better with stress, and studies show that long-distance drivers who had a carbohydrate-rich snack suffered less fatigue. The best snack choices are from the starchy carbohydrates group or fruit. Snacks rich in fats and sugars or protein are unlikely to boost performance so go easy on these.

If suitable snacks aren't readily available at work you may need to bring them in from home. Fresh or dried fruit are ideal snacks, are very portable and will help you achieve your '5 a day'. Other snack ideas are:

A currant bun with low fat spread
A low-fat cereal or yoghurt bar
Breadsticks with low fat dip eg hummous

A glass of semi-skimmed milk and a biscuit
Rice cakes or crackers with low fat cheese
One or two fruit biscuits eg garibaldi or fig rolls

'Lifting' lunches

A moderate sized lunch, boosted by an afternoon snack, reduces drowsiness and improves reaction time and mood. The body has a natural efficiency 'dip' in the afternoon which happens whether we eat lunch or not. However large lunches make this worse so if you have job which needs high levels of afternoon concentration, it might be better to have your main meal later in the day. For ideas on packed lunches see www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/070924PackedLunches.pdf.

Top Tips for Lunch

- Avoid high fat meals ie deep fried food, high fat sandwiches and crisps. These are bad for our hearts, waistlines and afternoon concentration
- Base your meal on starchy carbohydrates eg. breads, jacket potatoes, pasta or rice
- 'Supersize' on salad and vegetables. Try to make them fill half of your plate or meal
- However busy you are try to relax while you are eating by turning off your PC and ignoring your telephone. Taking time to enjoy a meal will help you feel more satisfied and fuller for longer



Love your liquids....a final word on fluids

- Working in an air conditioned office is very dehydrating – dehydration is a major cause of daytime fatigue and headaches
- Drinking 8 – 10 cups of fluid each day will keep you hydrated and help you to work well.
- Drink as much water as you can. Ask your employers to provide a water cooler.
- Limit caffeine-rich drinks to 4 a day. Other suitable drinks include diluted fruit juice, sugar-free squash or carbonated drinks, decaffeinated and fruit teas.



Energising Exercise

Don't forget too the role that exercise plays in keep us healthy and energetic. Building activity into your working day such as walking during your lunch break, using stairs instead of lifts, and walking or cycling to work is just as important as eating well.

You can get more ideas on being active at work from the British Heart Foundation workplace website www.bhf.org.uk/thinkfit



Other useful websites:

To find a registered dietitian in your area, click on www.dietitiansunlimited.co.uk
Dietitians can provide individual dietary advice as well as support and consultancy to companies looking to improve health at work.

British Dietetic Association Weightwise campaign: www.bdaweightwise.com

British Dietetic Association Factsheets: www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/index.html

Cancer Research UK: info.cancerresearchuk.org/healthyliving



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