

EAT RIGHT AT WORK

The workplace can be a nutritional battlefield with doughnuts in the break room, co-workers' candy bowls, and afternoon birthday cake. More organizations are coming up with strategies — like healthy meeting guidelines — to help employees make better food choices.

But when it comes to wellness, workplace culture change can happen at a glacial pace — so don't rely on corporate policies to protect you from nutrition pitfalls. Take charge of your choices to nourish your mind and body — so you can move through your day feeling fantastic and doing your best work.

Create a Plan

Make a habit of meal-planning once a week — simply map out your breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack ideas for each day. Then, make a shopping list and stock your fridge and cupboards. Download your worksite's cafeteria menu and decide when to buy lunch and when to brown-bag it. Freeze dinner leftovers for grab-and-go meals — and prepare snacks and lunches the night before. Planning ahead gives you more choices — and saves money.

Rise and Dine

It's no secret that starting your day with a power breakfast is vital when it comes to all-day energy — and weight management. Skipping breakfast might seem to cut calories, but studies show it actually promotes weight gain and stifles brain function. Not hungry in the morning? Eat dinner earlier and cut back on bedtime snacking.

Choosing a variety of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, low-fat or skim dairy products, and whole grains with your morning meal is your best bet for a high-energy day and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Including protein-rich foods like eggs, nuts, seeds, and dairy products staves off hunger more effectively than a mostly carbohydrate meal. Try these delicious, easy-to-fix ideas:

- Blueberry smoothie with low-fat yogurt
- Nut butter or sunflower seed butter on whole-grain toast with fruit
- Scrambled eggs with basil, oregano, tomatoes, bell peppers, whole-grain toast and orange juice
- Whole-grain hot cereal topped with a sliced banana, 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts or almonds, and skim milk
- Roll up a whole-wheat tortilla with Neufchatel cheese and strawberries

Sensible Snacks

Skip the vending machines and stock your

own scrumptious snacks for long-lasting vim and vigor. Pair complex carbohydrates with protein and a small amount of fat for sustainable energy — and control portions to avoid calorie overload:

- Whole wheat crackers and low-fat cheese
- Sliced bell peppers, baby carrots, whole-grain pita slices, and hummus
- Apple slices with 1 tablespoon peanut or sunflower seed butter
- ½ turkey sandwich on whole grain bread with low-fat cheese and mustard
- 1 ounce of almonds with a cup of mixed fruit

Lunchtime Cuisine

Avoid fatty foods and highly processed fare, which can leave you feeling sluggish and wanting more after a meal. Instead, choose foods close to their natural state whenever possible — they're more satisfying, more nutritious, and more likely to sustain you through the afternoon. Check out these examples:

- Whole-grain pita stuffed with 1/3 cup homemade egg salad (made with reduced-fat mayo) and vegetables
- Vegetable soups: mushroom-barley, chicken-vegetable, or potato- broccoli, for example. Pair a bowl of soup with a ½ sandwich and a cup of grapes or strawberries.
- Whole-wheat burrito with low-fat refried beans and/or lean ground beef and vegetables plus pair of mandarin oranges.
- Spinach, arugula, and romaine salad tossed with cherry tomatoes, onion, peppers, carrots, and 1 ounce of cubed low-fat mozzarella. Top with 2 tablespoons of light vinaigrette. Add a whole-grain dinner roll with deli turkey on the side.
- Find healthier restaurant choices with the Healthy Dining Finder.

Sweets for the Sweet

It's OK to treat yourself to a little something sweet as long as you keep the portions — and calories — under control. In fact, a small periodic indulgence may help prevent binge-eating that often results from restrictive eating habits. Tricks and tips:

- Fill up on fiber while curbing your cravings with fruit and berries.

- Keep only single-serving portions of chocolate and other high-calorie treats at your work station.
- Steer clear of the vending machine, with its super-size candy bars and multiple-serving bags of candy.
- Make some homemade trail mix with dried cranberries or bananas, nuts or seeds, and pretzels.
- Savor it. Satisfy your taste buds with smaller amounts by eating slowly, fully experiencing the treat's appearance, scent, taste, and texture.

Additional Resources

Workplace Wellness: Healthy Eating on the Job, New Jersey Cooperative Extension set.njaes.rutgers.edu/pdfs/fs1106.pdf

The Many Benefits of Breakfast, WebMD www.webmd.com/diet/features/many-benefits-breakfast

Tips for Making Healthier Fast Food Choices, HelpGuide.org helpguide.org/life/fast_food_nutrition.htm

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.™



©2009 American Council on Exercise®

To obtain reprint permission contact the American Council on Exercise®