

# Prevention C+olumn

EATING AT WORK – JANUARY 2021

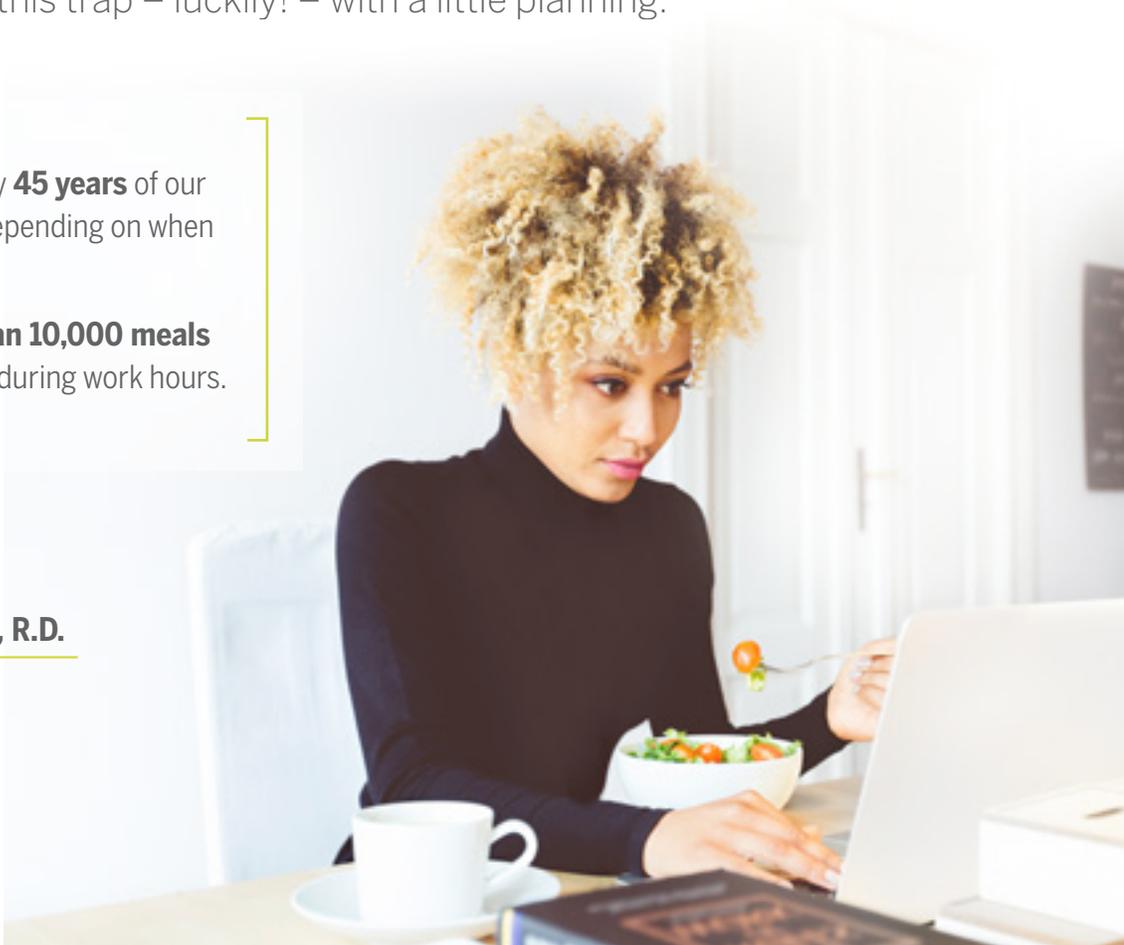
## Healthy eating while at work

At work, when we're busy and stressed, the first thing that goes is time out to eat. But we can avoid this trap – luckily! – with a little planning.

- Work takes up approximately **45 years** of our life, and sometimes more, depending on when we retire.
- This period means **more than 10,000 meals** and almost as many snacks during work hours.

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# Proven benefits of healthy eating at work

Whether you go to a snack bar, restaurant, cafeteria, eat a boxed lunch or eat while teleworking, data indicates that healthy eating at work has various benefits:

- You get the energy you need to do daily tasks and be more productive
- Your stress levels are reduced due to the pleasure of eating good food and taking time for yourself
- You reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and some cancers
- You're in a better mood at work
- You're less likely to miss work

Even if there are significant differences between workplaces and jobs, one thing is for sure: **after four or five hours without eating, energy and concentration levels drop and the risk of overeating at the next meal increases.** In addition, irregular schedules and long hours often lead to bad food choices during the day, the evening and even at night!<sup>1</sup> Your brain doesn't work well when the body is undernourished!

Given these facts, many employers have implemented health and wellness programs, including eating well at work. How have they done this?

- They adopted a company health and wellness policy
- They make healthy food choices available in the breakroom or vending machines
- They make fruit, water and less sugary drinks available during meetings
- They equip kitchenettes with a toaster, microwave, refrigerator, kettle and water fountain
- They review the cafeteria menu
- They create interior and exterior eating spaces
- They become a pick-up point for local vegetable and fruit basket subscription deliveries
- They include registered dietitian services in their group insurance plan, etc.<sup>2</sup>

**These are just a few ideas for contributing to better health!**



## No time to eat AT WORK?

Skipping a meal (often breakfast or lunch) on the pretext you have too much work will do more harm than good. An empty stomach makes it difficult to concentrate, can lead to headaches, and sometimes even dizziness, nausea and blurred vision. If you have any of these symptoms, your body needs nourishment. There's an easy rule to follow. Depending on your level of tolerance and state of health, don't go more than three to five hours without eating, even if it's just a substantial snack such as nuts, Greek yogurt, cheese and crackers, a few dates with a glass of milk or a soy beverage.

Are you someone who survives on coffee in the morning, thinking breakfast isn't important? Caffeine, even though it's a stimulant, does not provide the real energy needed by the body to perform well. Have a bowl of cereal or yogurt with a banana or whole grain toast with cottage cheese or peanut butter with your morning coffee. That'll do the trick! ■

## EATING in front of the screen

Desktop computer, laptop, tablet or cell phone, we are spending more time eating in front of a screen. The 2020 pandemic reinforced this tendency with its social distancing rules.

In addition to contributing to a sedentary lifestyle, this bad habit can cause vision problems. British researchers have demonstrated that this habit also has an impact on our waistline. Study participants who ate while using their computers didn't feel as if they were getting their fill and didn't remember the meal they ate as well as study participants who weren't distracted while eating. That's why it's important to stop, even for a short time, to eat mindfully, without distractions and without over-consuming food.<sup>34</sup> ■



## Germ-y keyboards!

The workplace is full of all types of bacteria, mould and germs that linger on your mouse, the keyboard and the desk itself. The results of a 2018 study confirmed that cellphones and keyboards are highly contaminated (92% and 96% respectively) by these microorganisms. **Some of them are pathogens that are especially harmful for people with compromised immune systems.**

According to tests, using moist disinfecting wipes reduced the number of germs, even eliminating them on one cellphone; these wipes are less effective, however, for keyboards. Note that on average everyone touches their face about 16 times an hour. This is another reason to wash your hands before touching food and not eating in front of one's computer.<sup>6</sup> ■

## In conclusion

For your physical and mental well-being, it is better to take a break to eat well and disconnect if we want to be more efficient. At the same time, doing so will prevent other health problems in the short and long term. ■

## Six good teleworking tips

When teleworking, when your colleagues can't see, it is tempting to snack on cereal right out of the box or crunch on chips. But working from home has real health advantages, such as easier access to healthy food and a kitchen.<sup>5</sup> Here are some tips on how to capitalize on this.

1. Set checkpoints in your schedule, meaning a routine based on your new reality. What would I suggest? Eat breakfast before sitting down at your computer or set yourself a reasonable window for having lunch, say no later than 1:30 p.m.
2. Make your meal break easier by cooking extra portions for supper as often as possible. This way you will have lunch ready to heat up in the microwave.
3. Give your eyes and your brain a break by not eating in front of the screen.
4. Don't eat for the sake of eating. Do you need to take a break? Get up, stretch, get a few minutes of fresh air, drink a big glass of water or make some tea.
5. Set up a healthy snacks corner in your cupboard when you need a quick pick-me-up. Include almonds, dried fruit and nut mixes, energy bars (with at least four to five grams of protein and fibre), plain popcorn, sugar-free fruit sauces, dried dates or apricots, whole grain crackers, peanut or other nut butters, etc.
6. Choose water for hydration and preventing headaches. Avoid drinks that have added sugar, even if they are not carbonated. Choose carbonated water or a cup of tea. ■

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