

HEALTH & THE CITY

Deadlines, back-to-back meetings and interstate travel often mean healthy eating and regular exercise are far from the most important things on our minds. We'd all benefit from some top tips on incorporating good health into our work lives.

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While many of us can easily allocate times for meeting and teleconferences, most of us struggle to find the time to break for lunch or to prepare ourselves a healthy dinner. You may think it's fine to frequent the vending machine for quick energy fixes or classify walking from your desk to the rest room as exercise, but these habits are anything but good for your health. Here we give you strategies for avoiding the health pitfalls in your typical working day.

6AM: BREAK-THE-FAST

Many of us may choose an extra 10 minutes under the sheets over a healthy breakfast, while others may simply not be able to stomach it. But, skipping your morning munch can be damaging to your health and productivity. On top of reducing metabolism, research shows people who skip breakfast actually weigh more than breakfast eaters. On top of helping you with your weight, breakfast also improves alertness and concentration, increasing productivity and reducing the likelihood of overtime.

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□ To Do: Eat breakfast every morning. Why not get up 10 minutes earlier or pack something healthy such as fruit and yoghurt the night before and eat it at work? Preparation is the key. You could also keep healthy breakfast options in the office. Simply purchase all your breakfast needs on Monday morning and store them in the work fridge. If you're one of those people who can't stomach breakfast, you could try a liquid breakfast such as fruit smoothies or *Up & Go*.

7AM: ACTIVELY COMMUTE TO WORK

Few of us are lucky enough to live within walking distance to our work, with many of us relying on public transport or cars to take us into the office. Long commutes sap us of our energy and deprive us of quality time with others. They also increase the amount of time we spend sedentary, reducing energy expenditure and making weight maintenance difficult.

□ To Do: Travel before peak hour and make use of the extra time before work. You could get off a few stops early and walk or run the rest of the way, or you could join a gym close to your office and work out before work. Either way, you'll be working towards ensuring you reach the recommended 30-plus minutes of physical activity each day.

9AM: FIRST COFFEE RUN

Forget the Nescafe with a dash of milk; coffees are now available as anything from a caffe latte to a frappuccino-blended cr me with cream on top! They contain loads more milk, not to mention sugar, chocolate powder or syrups. Then, of course there's the caffeine issue, with too much reducing concentration and disrupting sleep. Most of us don't stop at one either. Instead we rely on three or more to get us through the working day.

□ To Do: Enjoy your daily coffee, but limit your intake to one regular espresso coffee each day and avoid ordering it strong. Choose skim milk and say no to the sugar. Wean yourself off caffeine by cutting back slowly. Alternate between regular and decaf coffee, before reducing the number you have each day and then reducing the size of your coffees.

12NOON: LUNCH BREAK

Too much work and no play, does not make you more productive. Instead, you'll find it difficult to concentrate mid-afternoon, and become irritable as your blood sugar levels drop. When this happens, you're more likely to turn to quick energy fixes such as chocolates and lollies. These foods may boost you initially, but it won't be long before they'll have you crashing back down.

□ THE 1,2,3 OF FITTING HEALTH INTO YOUR DAY

- 1. Make it a priority:** Assess how important you actually think your health is. Often we take our health for granted and don't think about it until something goes wrong. But, by then it's too late. Find time for health in your day and reap the benefits.
- 2. Plan, plan, plan:** As business owners you plan everything else in your day, so why should your health be any different? Assign a time for your exercise and schedule in your grocery shopping. Even write a menu plan of all your meals for the following week.
- 3. Be organised:** Keep a grocery list and shop regularly so that you have all the food you need to prepare healthy meals. If you know you'll be home till late, cook extra food the night before and reheat it when you get home. Keep nuts and cereal bars in your bag for those times when you're stuck in traffic.

□ To Do: Take your lunch break. Even if you stop for just 15 minutes, getting out of the office and eating a healthy lunch will boost your motivation, help clear your head and keep you from binge eating in the afternoon. Get organised and bring lunch from home, or create a lunch club at work with a few colleagues. Each person takes a turn each week to bring in lunch for everyone else. That way you'll only have to plan your lunch once or twice a week.

3PM: IDENTIFY THE MINDLESS EATING

You've caught 3:30itis and you need sugar now! Or it could just be the simple action of sitting at your desk that causes you to reach for anything edible. And the more accessible the food is, the more you'll eat it. One study found secretaries eat six more chocolates each day if they're placed on their desk as opposed to two metres away. The good news is, the act of having to do a little more work for food can help us eat less.

□ To Do: Keep your food in the work kitchen, and not in your drawer or on your desk. If you need to keep food close by, make sure it's fruit, unsalted nuts or water. Store lollies or biscuits in opaque jars at the back of the cupboard or fridge, with the healthier options more visible in front. Food out of sight is out of mind also.

6PM: OVERTIME

Overtime cannot always be avoided, but it's important you know about the damage it's doing to your body. Studies have shown that over 10 years, too many nights working back late can increase your weight by 15kg or more. Long hours promote skipped meals, vending machine binges and late night drive-thru dashes. While fast food may be convenient, it's loaded with kilojoules, fat, salt and sugar, and lacks fibre.

□ To Do: You'll know you're working back late well in advance, so plan your dinner. Take a break at a reasonable hour when healthy food outlets are still open. Alternatively, you could take last night's

leftovers or store frozen meals at work. Remember, overtime does not mean you have to make poor food choices.

MIDNIGHT: HIT THE SHEETS

Over half of us do not get enough sleep and now health effects linked to chronic exhaustion are on the rise. Emails and text messages interrupt sleep throughout the night, which keep stress levels elevated and interfere with sleep quality. The release of growth hormone in the body is reduced, which means our body holds onto extra kilojoules instead of burning them. Inadequate sleep also plays havoc on our hunger hormones, increasing hunger and food intake the following day.

□ To Do: Switch off all forms of technology before hitting the sheets, and write a list of important jobs that need to be completed the following day. Then, rest easy for seven or eight hours each night. If you can't manage this amount of sleep during the week, make sure you catch up on some zzzzs on the weekend. **DB**

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