Bupa

Healthy eating during the workday.

Bupa. Better for business

Workplace
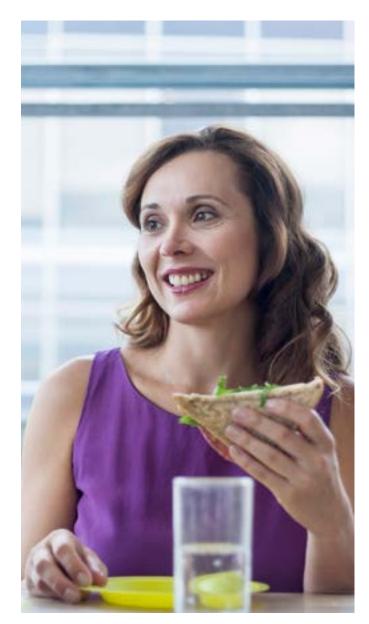**Health and Wellbeing Academy**

Introduction.

We all know that eating well is central to our health and wellbeing.[1] But our actions don't always meet our intentions. Sometimes life gets in the way, and on a busy, stressful working day it can be hard to achieve that balanced diet.

We all need the right balance of nutrients to fuel the body and keep everything working as it should.[1] And the effects of our diet can impact the workplace. Studies suggest that people who are overweight and obese take more sick leave every year than their colleagues.[2] While malnutrition in people who don't eat enough healthy food can affect how they function in everyday life and lead to long-term ill health.[1,2] Looking after colleagues' health will benefit them, and your organisation.[2]

There are many things that employers can do to help their colleagues when it comes to healthy eating. Some are big changes that it may be a challenge to put in place. But there are also some little tweaks or nudges that will help employees to stay healthier at work.

As a manager, you have a really important role in supporting staff wellbeing and promoting good mental health in the workplace.[2]

Click the home icon at any point in this guide to return to this page.

[1]British nutrition foundation's healthy eating week 2022. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk/media/qx2nrxfq/hew-workplace-pack-final.pdf, accessed published 2022

[2]Keramat Sa Alam K Gow J Et Al. Gender differences in the longitudinal association between obesity, and disability with workplace absenteeism in the australian working population. PloS One, 2020; 15(5):e0233512. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32459804/. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0233512.

Healthy snacks in the workplace

Snacks at work can be a healthy addition to a diet. But leaving do cakes and birthday biscuits, can have a negative effect on health if they happen too often. It's the type of snacks, and how many you eat that matters.[3] Healthy snacks can give you an energy boost and provide vital nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.[3] And they may stop you overeating at lunch as they stop you from becoming too hungry.[3] But if you opt for unhealthy snacks, they often contain lots of extra fat, sugar and salt. So choose carefully try not to eat too many.[3]

Swap the cakes and biscuits for fruit and vegetable sticks. Or try swapping a brownie for some malt loaf.[1, 3]

[1]British nutrition foundation's healthy eating week 2022. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk/media/qx2nrxfq/hew-workplace-pack-final.pdf, accessed published 2022

[3]Healthy snacks: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-snacks.html, accessed published September 2018

There's evidence to show that really simple changes to the environment can affect our eating behaviours. Just having something in the line of sight makes us more likely to go for it.[3, 4] For example, at Google's New York offices, employees were getting through a considerable number of the free sweets that were available. But, when they were moved into opaque containers – and healthy snacks were displayed more prominently – this sweet consumption dropped.[5] Google hadn't withdrawn the perk of free sweets. Instead they had nudged their employees towards making healthier choices.[5]

Are there any similar things you could try in your office? When someone brings in snacks or treats, could you put them in a cupboard, rather than on display? If you have an on-site caterer, could you speak with them about making similar changes? If there's a vending machine, see if this can be filled with nuts, seeds or protein bars, instead of high-calorie, high-sugar snacks.[1]

There are many initiatives you could introduce to the workplace.[3] Discuss these decisions and changes with your colleagues and make a joint commitment to being healthier, instead of just 'imposing' the changes.

[1] British nutrition foundation's healthy eating week 2022. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk/media/qx2nrxfq/hew-workplace-pack-final.pdf, accessed published 2022

[3] Healthy snacks: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-snacks.html, accessed published September 2018

[4] Duckworth Al and Gross Jj. Behavior change. Organ Behav Hum Decis Process 2020; 161:39-49. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7946166/. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.09.002.

[5] Baskin E Gorlin M Chance Z Et Al. Proximity of snacks to beverages increases food consumption in theworkplace: A field study. Appetite 2016; 103:244-48. https://www.academia.edu/24990207/Proximity_of_snacks_to_beverages_increases_food_consumption_in_the_workplace_A_field_study. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.04.0250195-6663/.

Eating out at work

In some roles, eating out and entertaining clients is almost part of the job description. Seeking out the healthy options at a restaurant can be easier said than done, and some restaurants will be better than others. Do a bit of research on the restaurants near your office, and create a shortlist of those with good healthy options. Encourage colleagues to opt for these places instead.

Why not see if any of them could offer a discount for your company's employees?

Corporate drinking culture

Friday drinks can be a weekly ritual in some workplaces, and even more widespread than the eating out culture. Alongside the well-known health risks of drinking, many alcoholic beverages are also high in calories, compounding the effects of a poor diet.[6] Alcohol can negatively impact productivity too. Whether it's a hangover or coming to work still feeling the effects of one, research shows it affects work, and costs the UK economy more than £7 billion annually.[7]

A drinking culture can be hard to reverse. But remember that if you're a leader or manager you'll be setting an example to others. By drinking sensibly yourself on an evening out, you'll help to set the right tone. Make sure there are plenty of no-alcohol versions of drinks available, which are increasingly popular.[4] Give your team the option to go alcohol free.

Socialising after work doesn't always need to be in a bar or pub either. See if there are any other ways you and your team can spend time together.[7]

Are there any leisure centres nearby where you could do a team sport? Or you could start a lunchtime walking club to get those step-counts up.

[4]Duckworth Al and Gross Jj. Behavior change. Organ Behav Hum Decis Process 2020; 161:39-49. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7946166/. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.09.002.

[6]Alcohol facts: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com/resource/alcohol-facts.html, accessed published April 2019

[7]Alcohol in the workplace. Alcohol Change Uk. https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/fact-sheets/alcohol-in-the-workplace, accessed 12 July 2022

Mental wellbeing

What we eat can affect our mental wellbeing. For example, skipping breakfast can make you feel weak, tired and affect concentration.[8]

While stress is closely linked to drinking and eating behaviours.[7, 9] This means that people who are under considerable pressure at work may struggle to follow a healthy and balanced diet. Employers are responsible for their people's health and wellbeing. Making sure that they're not at risk of long-term stress is a key part of this.

[7.] Alcohol in the workplace. Alcohol Change Uk. https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/fact-sheets/alcohol-in-the-workplace, accessed 12 July 2022

[8.] Food and mood: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com/resource/food-facts-food-and-mood.html, accessed published August 2020

[9.] Eating disorders. Rethink Mental Illness. www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions/eating-disorders/?gcli d=CjwKCAjwt7SWBhAnEiwAx8ZLakiBjwy12TMlxhvD4iLHoEr4cG7kl7fnpnrcPLtRsyo-Nx1wEVllvRoC6CcQAvD_BwE, accessed 12 July 2022

Healthy eating for home workers

If you have a hybrid working team, it's no excuse to skip responsibility for healthy eating measures.[1]

Think of ways you can encourage your team to stay healthy at home. For example, you could email some healthy eating inspiration to your teams. Or take it in turns to suggest new types of vegetables or pulses to use in a recipe that they can report back on.[1] Mix it up and make sure everybody feels included in your healthy eating goals.[1]

Setting the right environment as a leader is critical to changing culture. It will also help you to promote a positive health and wellbeing focus in the workplace.

[1]Malnutrition matters. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk/life-stages/older-people/malnutrition-and-dehydration/malnutrition-matters/, accessed reviewed August 2019

Sources.

1. British Nutrition Foundation's healthy eating week 2022. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk, published 2022

2. Keramat SA, Alam K, Gow J, et al. Gender differences in the longitudinal association between obesity, and disability with workplace absenteeism in the Australian working population. PloS One, 2020; 15(5):e0233512. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0233512

3. Healthy snacks: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com, published September 2018

4. Duckworth AL and Gross JJ. Behavior change. Organ Behav Hum Decis Process 2020; 161:39–49. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2020.09.002

5. Baskin E, Gorlin M, Chance Z, et al. Proximity of snacks to beverages increases food consumption in the workplace: A field study. Appetite 2016; 103:244–48. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.04.0250195-6663/

6. Alcohol facts: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com, published April 2019

7. Alcohol in the workplace. Alcohol Change UK. alcoholchange.org.uk, accessed 12 July 2022

8. Food and mood: Food fact sheet. British Dietetic Association. www.bda.uk.com, published August 2020

9. Eating disorders. Rethink Mental Illness. www.rethink.org, accessed 12 July 2022

10. Malnutrition matters. British Nutrition Foundation. www.nutrition.org.uk, reviewed August 2019

11. Obesity prevention. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). www.nice.org.uk, last updated 13 March 2015

12. Consumer spending on non-alcoholic beverages in the United Kingdom from 2005 to 2021 (in million GBP). Statista. www.statista.com, published 19 April 2022

bupa.co.uk/workplace-wellbeing