


Is your job making you *EAT*?



Takeaway lattes, snacks and celebratory cakes are just some of the office fat traps you need to avoid

If you have an office job, you're probably sitting down most of the day, and you already know that doesn't help you stay slim. But there are other problems: You may be so busy you tend to gulp lunch at your desk. Plus there are all those birthday cakes for your colleagues. And what about the snacks piled in the office pantry?

"To lose weight, you need to plan for situations you may face," says Dr George Blair-West, a psychiatrist and author of *Weight Loss for Food Lovers* (\$30.73, from Books Kinokuniya). "For example, you can decide not to stay at an office celebration very long if you find it difficult to say no to the food," he says.

Now let's look at how to cope with other temptations:



TIED TO YOUR DESK

Researchers at a US university found that today's office worker burns 502 to 616 fewer calories per day, on average, than an office worker 50 years ago. This can cause a 15 kg weight gain by retirement time.

"Moving from your desk is important. It burns calories and helps prevent back and muscle pain," says Evelyn Reutens, a clinical dietitian at Optima Nutrition & Sports Consultants. Some offices now use standing desks so you can do more work on your feet."

SOLUTION

Instead of IM or phoning or emailing your colleague, can you walk over to speak to them? Sitting down burns about 4.8 kcal an hour. Walking burns 143 kcal an hour.

MEETING ROOM MUNCHIES

Meetings can come with calorie-laden snacks. And when we're eating in company we're tempted to eat about 30 per cent more, explains Dr Blair-West.

"A big factor in how much we eat

WHAT A WAIST

Readers share their secrets on how to snack smart



"It's all about the portions. I pick the smallest piece and share it with someone. I also exercise so my weight stays in check."

– Chow Yiling, 33, marketing manager



"I usually say I'm too full or I don't want to ruin my next meal. But when something looks really enticing, I take a small part. I will only ruin my waistline for the best snacks!"

– Low Zhihui, 33, vice president at a bank



"A generous colleague offered me doughnuts. I brought them home for my active brother. He quickly burnt off the calories."

– Candice Choong, 26, senior corporate communication executive

is the influence of people around us – particularly people we look up to, like our bosses. If they eat more, we also tend to eat more," he says.

SOLUTION

If you know the person in-charge of the catering, gently suggest some healthier choices, like opting for wholegrain sandwiches or a fruit platter. "When you're at a staff party, remember that you may feel tempted to eat more, so think about what you eat," says Dr Blair-West.

BIRTHDAYS & CELEBRATIONS

Sometimes it feels like there is an office birthday celebration or baby's one month party every week! How do you cope? Jaclyn says, "Join in the fun! But when you are offered a piece of cake, ask yourself, 'Am I really hungry? Do I really want to eat this?' It is not rude to say nicely, 'I'm not hungry now, but thank you for the offer'."

SOLUTION

Have a small piece of cake and eat it with enjoyment. If you're not having cake, grab a drink so you can still enjoy something with your co-workers.



THE OFFICE CHEF

Every office has a keen home cook who enjoys bringing in baked treats and festive goodies to share. "Bringing in some homemade cookies is a simple way of saying, 'I care about you and I'm a fun person,'" explains Dr Blaire Wilson. But what happens when you're not hungry – but you don't want to offend someone by refusing a slice of their homebaked cake?

SOLUTION

"If you say you're on a diet, people sometimes don't listen," says Dr Blair-West. "Instead, say you can't eat this because you're on a special health-related diet. People usually accept this." "If colleagues often bring in cakes, try bringing in fresh fruits instead, or vegetable sticks with low-fat dip," suggests Jaclyn. "You might create a healthy change in your office."

DESK DINING

Cornell University's Dr Brian Wansink, author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think* (from \$17.12, from Books Kinokuniya), found people ate 45 per cent more popcorn, if they were watching a movie at the same time.

"If we eat at our desk we also answer emails and read reports... we're distracted, so we eat more. Yet we haven't savoured that food, so we feel unsatisfied. And then we reach for an afternoon snack," explains Jaclyn.

SOLUTION

Go outside for lunch or head to the pantry area. Focus on enjoying and tasting the food, and note when you start to feel full.

AFTERNOON SLUMP

If you eat a big lunch you'll get an energy dip in the afternoon as your blood glucose levels drop. Avoid this by having a lighter lunch of foods that slowly release energy.

Going for a walk can also lift your energy – a 20-minute walk cuts feelings of fatigue by as much as 65 per cent. "People also forget to drink water and this also depletes energy levels. Most offices have air conditioning, adding to our dehydration," says Jaclyn.

SOLUTION

Have a smaller lunch of low-GI foods such as brown rice, veges, fish or lean meats. If you need a snack, pick low-fat yoghurt, wholemeal crackers, or fruit. Keep a bottle of water at your desk to remind yourself to drink up.

KOPI TIAM TEMPTATIONS

While one or two *kopi siu dai* (coffee with milk, less sugar) is okay, but calories mount up if you start upsizing your lattes and adding fancy flavours. A large size blended coffee drink can be 340 calories, compared to 100 calories in a cup of low-fat latte. Try changing routes so you don't have to walk past enticing coffee shops or vending machines.

SOLUTION

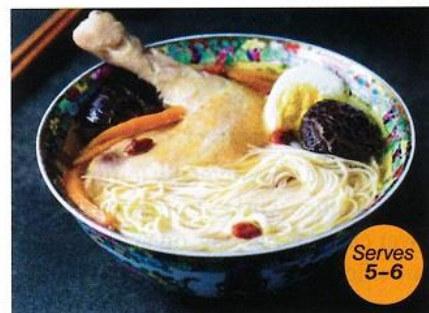
Opt for herbal teas instead of coffee, and drink one glass of water every hour. If there's a refrigerator at work, bring your own meals and snacks to eat. **W**

EAT AT HOME AND STAY SLIM

with a new Singapore recipe book to soothe your mood



A survey by the Health Promotion Board found that Singaporeans who eat out at least six times a week consume more fat and calories. Eating at home helps you slim down. For 80 recipe ideas, try *Kitchen Stories* (\$34.90, from Books Kinokuniya), a new cookbook by Singapore-based photographer Elodie Bellegarde and pastry chef Denise Hung.



Birthday Longevity Noodles

Denise based this on her granny's recipe

Ingredients: 3 shallots, sliced thinly • 4 cloves garlic, sliced thinly • A thumb-sized ginger, sliced thinly • 1 Tbs vegetable oil, for frying • 1 medium carrot, chopped • 3 chicken thighs with drumsticks, chopped • 1.5 litres of water • Sea salt and black pepper • 8 fresh shiitake mushrooms, sliced • 4 bundles of mee sua (or thin wheat noodles) • Handful of spring onions, finely chopped, to garnish • 2 hard-boiled eggs, quartered, to garnish • Sesame oil, to garnish

1. Over medium fire, heat vegetable oil in a deep pot with a lid. Turn fire to low, and lightly fry shallots, garlic and ginger until translucent, but not brown.
2. Add chicken chunks and carrots, and cook chicken until brown. Pour in water, turn fire to high and bring water to the boil. Skim off froth using a slotted spoon. Turn fire to medium and simmer soup for at least 45 mins. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Add in mushrooms to simmer for around 10 mins, or until they soften. Drop in mee sua noodles, cover pot with lid and turn off fire. Leave soup for 5 mins to cool slightly.
4. To dish out, divide chicken thighs, vegetables and noodles among 5 - 6 bowls. Pour broth over. Top with spring onions, hard boiled eggs. Drizzle over sesame oil, serve immediately.