STAYING HEALTHY AND CONTENT AT WORK

World Day for Safety and Health at Work (28 April) is an annual international campaign to promote safe and healthy work environments and the prevention of accidents and diseases at work.

The average person will live up to the age of 65 to 80 years. Of those approximately 80 years, 26 of them will be spent sleeping (seven more will be spent TRYING to sleep), while an impressive 13 years (on average) will be spent at work. With so much of your life dedicated to your job, it's important to become more aware of how you can stay healthy (and happy) while you are at work.

WHAT AND WHEN TO EAT AT WORK

When you are busy at your desk, workstation or job site, you may find it easier to grab a quick snack, instead of taking a proper lunch break. Generally, the food choices for snacking are hardly ever healthy, such as snacks from a vending machine.

A packet of chips, a chocolate or a fizzy drink is not a healthy option for snacks or lunch. These types of sugary and highly processed foods and drinks cause a rapid increase in your blood glucose levels, which then drops suddenly, leaving you on a sugar low. It is this drop in blood glucose that causes that post-meal slump. To avoid this, and to maximise your workday productivity, have a healthy lunch break and be selective with your snacks.

Here are some great workday snack options:

- **Nuts and seeds** are easy to store, last a long time and they are packed with healthy fats and compounds that help to regulate both blood glucose and appetite. Nuts, specifically almonds, also contain important nutrients that keep your brain healthy.
- **Biltong** is high in protein and will provide you with the energy you need. It is also an excellent source of vitamin B12, important for healthy blood vessels and nerve cells.
- **Eggs,** regardless of how they are prepared, are rich in a compound called 'choline' which plays a role in regulating your memory and your mood.
- **Veggie slices and dips,** such as carrots and cucumber slices with peanut butter (no salt or sugar added), cottage cheese, hummus or guacamole provide all the right amount of protein and fats, without any added carbohydrates, to keep you going all day.

TAKE REGULAR BREAKS THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Researchers have linked sitting for long periods of time with several health concerns, including obesity, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels. When your muscles are immobile, your circulation slows, you use less of your blood sugar, and you burn less fat.

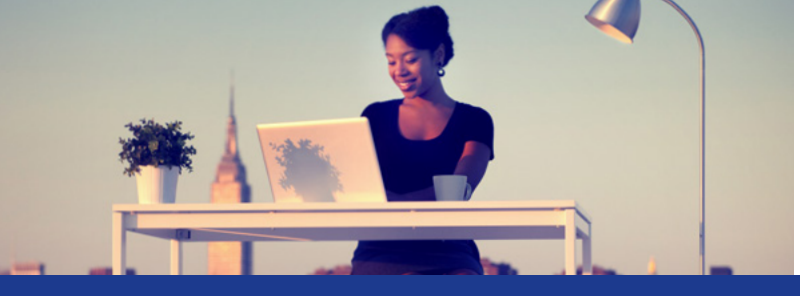
Besides the metabolic changes that come with prolonged sitting, it also affects alertness and productivity. Mental concentration is like a muscle – it becomes tired after sustained use and needs regular rest periods to recover and regain optimal focus.

Taking regular micro-breaks throughout the day can address both the physical and mental implications of a long day of sitting. Aim to get up and move at least once within an hour, for at least five minutes. Simply standing up and moving jumpstarts your metabolism, lowering your risk for disease.

SQUEEZE IN A LUNCHTIME WORKOUT

Try to incorporate some light exercise into your lunch break. Studies have shown that exercise can increase productivity. Why not add a 15-minute walk to your lunch break? Stepping outside for some sunlight and fresh air can help boost alertness.

CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT



Environmental cues play a huge role in your body's energy levels. Why not spruce up your desk or office space with a few plants. Plants improve the quality of the air around you, which could help to reduce allergies and headaches, both of which can be a strain on your health.

BE AWARE OF BURNOUT

Burnout is not only a buzzword; many people seem to be struggling with it, and it is a serious condition. Burnout refers to a group of symptoms, which include fatigue, anxiety, depression, listlessness and an inability to cope. In a nutshell, burnout is a form of exhaustion caused by a constant feeling of seemingly endless emotional, physical and mental stress.

Burnout leaves you feeling empty inside, with growing feelings of self-doubt and a desire to move away or get away from everyone and everything. It makes it hard for you to look after your physical and emotional needs, let alone anyone else's, and as a result, can leave you vulnerable to chronic sadness, fatigue and burnout. Avoiding burnout is often easier to do than bouncing back from it, so that's why being constantly mindful of how you're feeling and doing regular self-checks is so important.

Eating well, taking regular breaks and staying active is the secret to staying healthy in the workplace. Finding ways that relieve stress, connecting with others and ensuring you get sufficient sleep are also effective ways to both prevent and manage burnout.

Stand up on Freedom Day (27 April)!

Freedom Day is celebrated on 27 April in South Africa. It commemorates the first democratic elections held in South Africa on 27 April 1994. These were the first post-apartheid national elections to be held in South Africa where anyone could vote, regardless of their race.

References

Huffington Post
International Journal of Workplace Health Management
Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine
Nutrients journal
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
United Nations

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