

A Healthier Day of Work

Fitness and nutrition tips to stay fit, fueled, and productive



by Rachel Wallack

Every day of our lives, we make choices regarding our fitness and nutrition, sometimes without ever realizing it. What we eat, along with how and when we move, are decisions that affect our health. Day after day we build upon these habits.

Though we all know that eating right and exercising are good for us, this advice doesn't always speak to us as individuals. To develop good habits, we need to look closely at the nitty-gritty of our own hectic 9-to-5 existence.

It's time to pay attention to the decisions that fill each day—from what we do first thing in the morning to our pre-bedtime snack. Nearly every activity can promote better health, if you think about it. Whether you're concerned with general fitness, cardiorespiratory endurance, or a specific health condition, you can work healthy practices into your day. Start with small changes, and day by day you'll build new habits that will make a difference in how you feel, as well as in your overall health.

FITTING IN FITNESS

One of the biggest impediments to regular exercise is lack of time—or at least the perception of it. Toby Tanser, a long-time runner and coach, recommends a new kind of commute to work: on foot or by bicycle.

“Being healthy is starting your day on the right foot,” he says. “Many people would benefit from cycling or walking to work.” Choose a like-minded friend and challenge each other to walk or cycle to work twice per week or meet for morning runs. If you can, increase the frequency over time.

Likewise, you can run home with co-workers (or walk part of the way) to add exercise to your day; you'll start looking forward to it or at least get used to doing it.

If your job is too far away to travel to on foot or by bike, check out the local

gym, health club, or yoga studio in either your work or home neighborhood—whichever is most convenient for you. Working out is a great way to prepare for a busy day or to unwind afterward. Try to find a gym or studio that has shower facilities and that's along your route, so you'll be more likely to go.

If you're on a tight budget, unroll an exercise mat and work out at home; designating a certain area may help to keep you on task. By exercising at home, you can get your family

involved. Walk or cycle with other family

members, and use this opportunity to build healthy habits in your household; walk together before dinner or make a family commitment to doing a 5K walk or run. It'll help to have a goal, and you'll motivate one another.

Alternatively, you can exercise when



your kids are at school or sleeping. If it's feasible, make the morning hours your own by getting out of bed before everyone else. You'll fit in a workout before the kids stir and before you're craving breakfast. Just make sure you're not short-changing yourself on sleep; turn off the computer and TV earlier in the evening and hit the sack.

CONSCIOUS FOOD CHOICES

You've never had time for that perfect morning meal—the healthy kind. A little planning can do the trick:

- Shop for groceries on the weekend or early in the week so your kitchen is well stocked with fruit, vegetables, and other healthy options.
- Cut up fruit and leave non-perishables on the kitchen counter before you go to sleep, so breakfast will take less time in the morning.
- Keep a food log for a month. Review your notes, either on your own or with a nutritionist who can advise you on keeping up your healthy habits or making improvements.
- Ask a friend to join you for an instant support system.
- Start with small changes that you can maintain.

At lunchtime, "go away from your desk, and don't bring food back. Eat mindfully," advises Limor Baum, a registered dietitian with Nutrition Energy in NYC. Make a healthy lunch that you can take to work; you'll be less likely to eat junk food that's around or go to the closest convenience store.

Buying healthy snacks—unsalted nuts, dried fruit, and whole-grain granola bars—and keeping them at work will also help to break bad eating habits; you'll be less tempted by the vending machine when afternoon hunger hits.



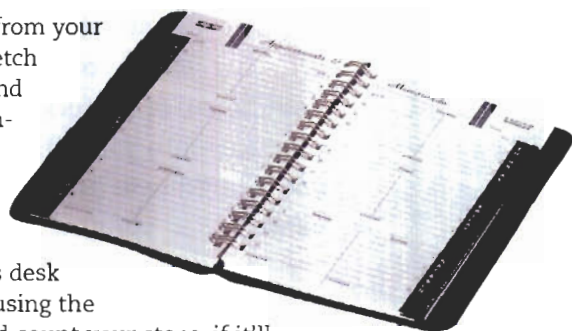
Baum knows that people tend to resort to junk food when they're stressed or anxious. That can be a mistake not only because these snacks are unhealthy, but because they can actually worsen stress symptoms. For example, eating sugary food can trigger a "sugar high" that's followed by a crash. Food high in saturated and hydrogenated fat, says Baum, can exacerbate feelings of fatigue.

PRACTICING AT WORK

Whether you work on the 28th floor in Midtown or in your home office, a day can pass by pretty quickly. Soon it's dinner-time, and you haven't made time for a workout. Add some form of exercise twice per week to start, even if your week's hectic.

Put your workouts on your calendar and treat them like other appointments that you wouldn't cancel. By starting small, you'll be able to stick with your plan and build up to a healthy routine that feels natural. Being active is as easy as putting on sneakers for a lunchtime walk. Recruit a co-worker and walk or run together—this will strengthen your commitment.

Get up from your desk to stretch your legs and move whenever have the chance; walk to a co-worker's desk instead of using the phone—and count your steps, if it'll help. Baum recommends using the stairs and getting out of the subway one stop early to add a few blocks of walking to your day. Adopt any of these practices and come up with others that fit in your workday. "If you have extra time while you're out," says Baum, "walk around the block a few times."



"Many people would benefit from cycling or walking to work."

—Toby Tanser, coach

A little preparation will support your newfound fitness. Keep walking or running clothes at work. "Venture out and see what's in your work neighborhood," Baum says. "There may be a gym on the corner or a 45-minute Pilates class advertised at lunchtime." You'll return to the office in a better state of mind.

Some companies offer incentives to get fit—gym benefits, work-sponsored sports teams, group outings—check with your employer to see if you're missing out on a program.

SURPRISING FITNESS PERKS

Raymond Cho, a relationship manager at an international bank based in NYC, learned that his company sponsors races around the world and pays for employees' flights to get there. "One colleague went to Hong Kong to run a half-marathon in December, a few finished a 250K race in Egypt in October, and someone else is racing in Mongolia next month," Cho says.

In 2004, the company started a marathon relay of 26.2-mile races in Nairobi, Singapore, Mumbai, and Hong Kong. "It's different than my experiences at other financial services firms," Cho says. "Here, personal goals are tied to the principles of the firm."

Some companies place a high value on workers' health and support of worthy causes. Danielle Natoli, a vice president in the finance division of a global financial services firm, appreciates the healthy benefits her company offers. There's the subsidized gym membership at a corporate gym near the Midtown offices and a fitness facility at her Jersey City office. "We have a wellness center, a health center, and a nutrition center," Natoli says. Specialists give medical and nutrition advice, including lab services, group weight-management classes, and individualized nutrition sessions.

Although atypical, these examples are good signs that companies haven't cut healthy benefits across the board.

Perhaps your company is willing to bring a nutrition expert or trainer to the office for

a group session or weight-loss program. By offering a gym discount or by encouraging lunchtime runs, your workplace can support employee health in a way that won't hurt its bottom line.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

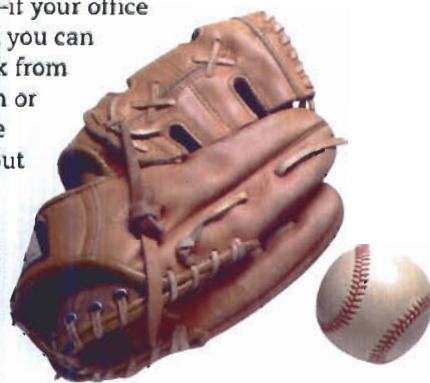
Most likely, the healthy new you will catch the attention of your colleagues. Once your co-workers are on board, you can bring nutritious eating habits into the office. If you have a cafeteria or food service at work, suggest menu items that are health-conscious. While you're at it, group breakfasts and lunches can be adjusted to include fruit and yogurt, salad, and healthy proteins; put in a request. Perhaps a pot-

luck picnic lunch makes sense at your company; you'll bond with co-workers over a low-cost and healthy meal.

You can work together to keep healthy eating in vogue at your office. Choose a communal area to collect healthy snacks and make a pact to keep it stocked. Take turns refilling. Your employer may see that it cuts down on breaks and provide a snack budget.

Work-sponsored sports teams are another way to get fit with your co-workers. Softball, basketball, and dodgeball leagues are options—if your office doesn't have a team, you can start one. If you work from home, joining a team or sports league may be the best way to get out the door in the evening.

Turn a post-work happy hour into a group run and you'll probably start an office trend. Begin your run at the office and finish at a restaurant. The best way to fit exercise into your daily life is to make it convenient and fun. This year's National Running Day initiative reached fitness enthusiasts across the country who ran or walked



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—Limor Baum, registered dietitian

on June 3; follow in their footsteps and declare today your day to start moving!

Baum thinks it's easy to be healthy in New York. "There are so many opportunities for nutritious food, and there are great parks in every borough," she says. "People just need the education to become aware of healthy options and to make the right decisions." Tanser, who calls Central Park his office, helps his clients make those smart choices as well. "They respond to the fun way I promote sport as a lifestyle," he says. You need only try to discover a healthier routine that fits into your day. You'll work at it for a little while—until it becomes habitual. Before you realize it, you'll be living healthier without giving it

