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## Is Lunch for wimps?

Companies are now waking up to the fact that employee wellness at work has an impact on a companies bottom line. Many companies have introduced programmes to benefit and support their workforce mentally and physically, however, there is still more to be done.

**Karen Shields**, a Nutritional Therapist from the Life Practice explains the importance of nutrition in the workplace and questions whether today's work culture discourages staff from taking lunch breaks.

These days, many employees do not take a lunch break. This may be for several reasons: perhaps they feel the culture within their organisation frowns upon it; perhaps they do not regard re-fuelling for lunch an important factor in their productivity or perhaps they are so busy that they do not notice lunchtime come and go. Whatever the reason, by not taking a break at lunch and refuelling they are in fact limiting their productivity, creativity, energy levels and concentration.

As a Nutritional Therapist, I am regularly faced with clients in my clinic with digestive disorders, namely Irritable bowel syndrome. During our consultation I find that they do not eat lunch due to work pressure or if they do, they are rushing their meal at lunchtime or eating it in front of the computer whilst still working. One of the prescriptive actions when writing out my client's Action Plan is: Eat regularly and Mindfully.

By taking time out away from your desk you are giving yourself, your mind, your body a change of environment which helps it to switch off and relax for a short period.

By eating lunch in a relaxed way and mindfully, you are able to use your senses of smell, sight, touch, taste and even hearing mindfully. I suggest to my clients to notice their senses when preparing their food and looking at what they are about to eat.

The body is made up of many systems: Cardiovascular, circulatory, digestive, endocrine, immune, lymphatic, respiratory, excretory, urinary, muscular, skeletal, nervous, reproductive and integumentary. These systems all rely on food to function at an optimum level.

The digestive process is a chain reaction of signals and messages that trigger the body to absorb the nutrients within the food. When a body digests food properly, the food is broken down into small enough molecules so that the nutrients are correctly released and absorbed by the small intestine and delivered to the body.

So by taking time out and noticing your senses the start the cascade by triggering your brain to release messages to your salivary glands in your mouth to release enzymes (salivary amylase) which starts the break down of food. There are further enzymes in the form of gastric juices in the stomach which are also released for digestion and these too are effected if they do not receive the message from the brain.

If you are sat in front of a laptop or television and distracted your brain misses the signals and does not effectively send the messages to release enough enzymes and therefore food is not broken down to small enough molecules.

When these messages and signals are not activated our food is not broken down effectively and ends up laying in the intestine to ferment and create gas and can lead to bloating and discomfort. Furthermore, fatigue and tiredness would set in during the afternoon and concentration levels would become affected.

Taking yourself away from your desk at lunchtime and mid morning and mid afternoon for a refreshment, snack or lunch provides you with time out to re-focus, renew and re-energise.

Physical activity is important, particularly if you have a sedentary job at a desk most of the day. By taking a walk during your lunch break this gives you time to breath some fresh air and re-boot.

Finally, relationships at work are also important. By establishing healthy connections and being pro-social with your office colleagues this can enhance your overall job satisfaction.

So, is lunch for wimps? I think not.

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