

HEALTHY LUNCH BREAKS

The term “lunch” means different things to different people.

In parts of southern Europe, it might involve a relaxed hour or two at home, a hearty meal, a spot of shopping and a refreshing siesta. In the UK or US, it more often signifies a quickly-grabbed sandwich at your desk or a sprint to the canteen or café and then back to work.

There is no doubt that lunchtimes are a superb opportunity to unwind and improve both your wellbeing and productivity. Indeed, taking your full lunch break may be good for your state of mind, your health and ultimately your company’s bottom line. Everyone wins.

So the first rule of healthy lunch breaks is **never** to be afraid or guilty about taking your full entitlement. If you have one hour then make sure you take the full hour. If your boss or a colleague has a problem with this then, quite frankly, they are ill-informed.

Once you accept the idea of taking a proper lunch break, how can you get the best out of it? Here are some ideas that could leave you truly buzzing with energy:

- **Lunchtime fitness.** Lunchtime is a superb opportunity to get out and enjoy some fresh air. Filling your lungs with oxygen with a brisk walk around the park will revitalise you. Alternatively, you could organise a short run or bike ride with your colleagues or even pop out to a nearby gym for a rapid lunchtime class. Failing that, you could simply do some basic stretches or low-impact exercises at your desk or in a quiet meeting room.
- **Lunchtime eating.** Never skimp on eating a proper lunch. Certain foods can help you concentrate (e.g. oily fish), while others provide much-needed energy. Make sure you eat fruit and vegetables and, if you choose sandwiches, go for variety rather than your “usual” every day. Aim to eat slowly to digest properly, perhaps with colleagues who make you laugh. Eating when stressed or while working is a definite no-no.
- **Lunchtime “recharging”.** Meditation is proven to relax and lower blood pressure: lunchtime is an excellent opportunity to create your private oasis of calm. A stroll outside (e.g. just 10 minutes of shopping or another active and enjoyable activity) can also do the trick. Finally, there is scientific support for the benefit of taking a short nap. Indeed, one study by the Harvard School of Public Health showed that taking regular “power naps” could make you significantly less likely to suffer from heart problems (assuming, of course, you also watch your weight, exercise and have a balanced diet).

Transforming your lunch breaks may help you transform your overall perception of the working day. The “afternoon energy dip” can become a thing of the past. You’ll work twice as well when you are fuelled by positive energy rather than negative stress.

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