Workplace health tips

Early starts and long days at the desk can be physically and mentally draining. Sitting or standing for extended periods of time can cause adverse health effects and nutritional traps abound in the workplace, often contributing to weight gain.

Health experts say there are many ways we can make our work environments healthier with simple changes like practising meditation to overcome workplace stress or blinking often to avoid dry eyes.

To help shed some light on how we can improve our health on the job, we’ve asked three experts on optometry, nutrition and stress management to share their work health tips.

Eye health in the workplace

To reduce the risk of dry eyes, irritation, headaches and sometimes blurry vision from excessive screen time, Jared Slater from Optometrists Association of Australia recommends:

- Minimising the glare on your computer screen from overhead lights or external windows.
- Adjusting settings - brightness, contrast and font size – to where your eyes feel most comfortable.
- Sitting an appropriate distance from the computer screen – about an arm’s length.
- Keep blinking, when we concentrate we blink less, which can lead to dry eyes.
- Taking regular breaks away from a screen, aim for five minutes every hour.
- Having a check with your optometrist if you experience any eye problems when using computers.

Nutrition at work

Unhealthy food can be a real temptation in the workplace. Between staff birthday cakes, easy access to vending machines and grabbing quick snacks on the run, it’s easy to slip into bad eating habits and compensate with high sugar options. Holly Smith from the Dietitians Association of Australia shares five simple steps to boost your health at work.

- Start the day with breakfast. Eating breakfast is vital for workplace success. A healthy breakfast helps you think clearer and concentrate better, and gives you more energy throughout the work day.
- Avoid the coffee trap. Many of us love a daily cup (or two) of coffee. Choosing large coffees made with regular-fat milk, adding sugar or opting for the sugary syrups can quickly hike up the kilojoules. Be sure to order the small serve, ask for lower-fat or skim milk, and skip the added sugar.
- Get some shut eye. Not only can poor sleeping patterns lead to a less productive work day, research shows that people who are sleep-deprived are also more likely to overeat and make unhealthy food choices. Do your health and waistline a favour and aim to get 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
- Re-energise your body. Moving stimulates your body to release feel-good hormones (endorphins).
- Feel better at work by looking for every opportunity to move more: walk to speak to a colleague rather than calling, grab regular glasses of water from the kitchen, or schedule in a walk at your lunch break.
• Beat the mid-afternoon energy slump. Running on empty can leave you feeling irritable, tired and unproductive. Be sure to include regular meals and snacks throughout the day. To keep you going, Accredited Practising Dietitian Lisa Renn recommends keeping healthy snacks at work such as fruit, yoghurt, wholegrain crackers and unsalted nuts.

Combatting stress in the workplace

Stress in the workplace for most of us is unavoidable. Whether it’s dealing with different personalities, office politics, high pressure deadlines or working long hours, the workplace is often a stress landmine.

Meditation teacher Jonni Pollard shares four tips to mitigate stress and help transform your working day.

Learn a meditation technique and practice it at least for at least 20 minutes a day. Meditation can help dissolve the effects of stress accumulated on a day-to-day basis.

Before you frantically rush out the door in the morning, sit quietly and visualise the day ahead and what you have to do. See your challenges and imagine yourself meeting them with grace and ease. Identify where there may be opportunities to become stressed and be on the lookout to avoid them.

If you feel your stress levels building, affirm that you have a choice at that moment to redirect your attention to stop the cycle continuing from that point on. Take two minutes in a chair. Close your eyes and breathe into your abdomen and then up into your chest. Repeating this activates the parasympathetic nervous system and calms the tight stress sensation in the chest. You may look like bit of a weirdo to some of your colleagues, but at least you’ll be a relaxed weirdo.

Be active in reviewing your work experience and identify the situations that repeatedly cause stress. The power lies with you to make the changes you need in your life, don’t rely on anyone else to make that change for you. Take control of your experience and make it work for you.