

Improved Health While You Work

By Casey Schacher

Today's professional must survive in a fast-paced demanding world that allows little time for concentration on health and fitness. This can be seen in the disturbing estimate that 134.8 million American adults are over-weight or obese.¹ Other issues, such as back problems, also arise from the physically sedentary lifestyle of many of our country's professionals. Work, especially in an office environment, often requires people to spend hours behind a desk, performing mentally demanding but physically inactive tasks. Additionally, poor eating habits and stress can be compounded in the office environment. Yet these stagnant hours can also be gold mines of opportunity to develop improved physical health. With a few simple changes to their daily routines, professionals can utilize time spent at work to enhance their overall health!

Drink Water

The functions of water in the body are numerous and include regulating body temperature, purging wastes, and protecting the organs. Consequently, water intake is essential to good health. One common recommendation of nutritionalists suggests that the average American adult consume 64 fluid ounces of water everyday.² That may seem like a lot, but when spread over the course of the day, that much water is manageable.

What better time than at the office to get a good start on your day's water intake? But do not overwhelm yourself; keep a small water bottle (12 ounces or less) near you and refill it. The body can digest small amounts of water more easily, and you will be more willing empty a small bottle than a large one.

Eat

Snacks aren't just for kids. Adults can benefit from eating in between meals as well. Unfortunately, snacking equates to a trip to the junk food machine for many professionals. Yet snacks during workday are perfect opportunities to include nutritional foods into your diet that might otherwise be left out. Before you leave for work, pack handy snack foods that are rich in nutrients to help curb hunger and boredom without candy bars and potato chips.

Good choices include fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods. Whole grain crackers are a good alternative to fried chips, but read the label carefully. Make sure the product contains whole grains and not processed flour, even if it is wheat flour. Processing strips the grain of much of its nutrition and negates the benefits of adding grains into your diet.

Carrots and broccoli are also handy snacks that are easy to pack, store well, and offer great nutritional benefits. Carrots contain beta-carotene while broccoli includes sulforaphane and both help prevent many types of cancer.³

When you pack snacks to take to work, also consider preparing a lunch. Eating out or from the vending machine is both costly and frequently unhealthy. Bringing a homemade lunch is an easy way to control portion size as well as quality and content of the food you eat.

Sit Up Straight

Back problems cause suffering for millions of workers every year. In fact, the American Chiropractic Association reports that about half of all working Americans have back problems.⁴ Poor posture greatly contributes to this often debilitating condition and causes a chain reaction of assaults against your health. Beyond joint and back problems, poor posture can cause damage to your respiratory, circulatory, and digestive systems.⁵

Because of this, it is essential to use proper posture during the many hours you spend at work. In order to correct your posture, hold your head straight and keep your knees, shoulders and hips level. Other tips include:

- Use a chair with firm low back support.
- Keep desk or table top elbow high, adjust the chair or use a footrest to keep pressure off the back of the legs, and keep your knees a little higher than your hips.
- Do not sit on a fat wallet; it can cause hip imbalance.
- Get up and stretch every hour.⁶

Exercise

Opportunities abound to engage in physical activity at the office, even if you do work primarily at a desk. Try using the stairs rather than the elevator, leave your lunch in the car so you have to go get it, or get a telephone headset and walk around while talking. Lunch breaks provide a perfect time to take a quick walk around the block after or before your meal. Are you a smoker? Use this time to take a short stroll instead.

Don't forget about those long hours sitting at a desk. Try the following exercises to get the most out of your workday:

Chair Squat and Tricep Dips

Chair Squat: Periodically while sitting, lift butt off the seat and hover over chair for 2–3 seconds. Stand up and repeat.

Dips: Make sure chair is stable and place hands next to hips. Move hips in front of chair and bend elbows, lowering body until elbows are at 90 degrees. Repeat.

Front Raise, Overhead Press and Bicep Curl

Front Raise : Sit in chair, abs in and spine straight. Hold water bottle in right hand and raise arm up to shoulder level. Hold 2 seconds and repeat other side.

Overhead Press: Hold water bottle in right hand, elbow bent, and extend arm overhead. Repeat other side.

Bicep Curl: Hold water bottle in right hand and, with abs in and spine straight, curl bottle towards shoulder. Repeat other side.

Abs

Abs: Sit on the edge of chair, arms extending in front. Keeping back straight, contract the abs and slowly lower torso towards back of chair. Hold 2–3 seconds and repeat.

Curls: Cross arms over chest and sit up straight. Contract abs and curl shoulder towards hips, pulling abs in. Hold for 2 seconds and repeat.⁷

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