

Memo to Working Americans: 'Desktop Dining' Trend Demands New Office Eating Etiquette

New Survey Reveals Office Desktop Replaces Kitchen Table for Breakfast, Lunch...Even Dinner

CHICAGO (September 30, 2003) — For many working Americans, eating a meal is just another task to juggle during a busy workday of e-mails, phone calls, meetings and deadlines. And as more employees opt to multi-task their way through breakfast, lunch and even dinner, "desktop dining" has quickly become a mainstay of corporate culture.

According to a new survey by the American Dietetic Association, a majority of Americans eat lunch (67 percent) and snack throughout the day (61 percent) at their desks, while more than one out of three typically find breakfast the first task on their workplace to-do list. And office demands are winning out over dining ambience for the small percentage (10 percent of men, seven percent of women) who dine desktop for dinner, as well.

In many cases, desktops have replaced kitchen tables as the primary place to eat meals, but that doesn't mean we should allow bacteria to work overtime. It's important that your mealtime multi-tasking also includes practicing proper food safety techniques.

Fridge Faux Pas

The traditional lunch hour may be a thing of the past, but when it comes to protecting themselves against foodborne illnesses, many professionals are still "out to lunch." According to the ADA survey, the most popular brown bag options for working Americans include meat and cheese sandwiches (69 percent), leftovers (64 percent) and salads (37 percent) — all of which can spoil if not properly refrigerated.

Yet, survey results show that nearly 30 percent of Americans who bring their lunch to work don't store them in the office refrigerator. And of those, more than four out of five typically leave their lunch unrefrigerated for more than three hours before eating — which means foods may be spoiled even before the first bite.

Perishable foods should never sit out for more than two hours. At that point, bacteria begin to multiply rapidly, increasing your risk of food poisoning.

Office Eating Etiquette

The same food safety rules also apply to shared foods. From staff birthday celebrations to post-meeting leftovers, these community treats are an office staple — but they can also be dangerous business if perishable foods are not properly refrigerated.

Our hectic work schedules may have changed the way we eat, but the basic rules of food safety are still the same. As kitchens continue to extend beyond the home and into the office, Americans need to re-think their desktop dining habits and make sure proper office eating etiquette is on their daily to-do list.

Food Safety To-Dos for the Desktop Diner

Give bacteria the pink slip by following proper food safety tips from the ADA:

- Wash hands before and after digging into your desktop dish. If you can't get to a restroom to wash hands with soap and water, keep moist towelettes or an anti-bacterial hand cleaner at your desk.
- From the time you make your lunch at home — assuming it contains perishable food items, as many brown bags do — don't let more than two hours pass before you put it in the refrigerator. Also, don't let lunchtime leftovers remain unrefrigerated for more than two hours.
- Keep perishable foods properly refrigerated below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Not sure what the temperature in the office fridge is? Do yourself and your co-workers a favor by bringing in a refrigerator thermometer from home to keep track.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or microwave, not on the countertop.
- If you bring leftovers for lunch, re-heat them to the proper temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Don't forget that the same food safety tips apply to carry-out and fast food, which also can be susceptible to bacteria if not handled properly.

With approximately 65,000 members, the American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA serves the public by promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being. To locate a registered dietitian in your area, visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org.

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**Impulse Research Corporation conducted the home food safety survey in August 2003 for the American Dietetic Association through an online survey of a random sample of 1,024 full-time employees, both men and women, who work at a desk. The sample was chosen to closely match U.S. population demographics.*

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