



[eatwell@work](mailto:eatwell@work)

A guide to eating well in the workplace


[www.eatwelltas.com.au](http://www.eatwelltas.com.au)

# How to use this booklet

The booklet is divided into 2 sections.

The first section is called *Dear Employee*. It is aimed at things employees can do to “Eat Well in the Workplace”.

The second section is for employers and is called *Dear Employer*. It provides ideas on how to make it easier for your employees to “Eat Well at Work”.

Whenever you see this symbol , it means there is a link or reference on the resources page.

**No matter whether you are an employee or employer, both sections can offer useful information to help you. Lists of websites and resources have also been included if you would like further information or help.**



*Produced in August 2007*

Dear employee,

## Why eating well at work is important

Let's face it. You spend a major amount of your time at work (on average 30 to 40% of your waking hours). If you don't eat well at work, you're going to run into trouble.

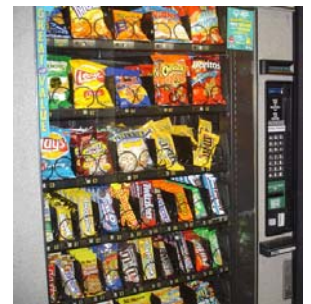
Eating well at work will help you in many ways including:

- ✓ Increased energy levels.
- ✓ Increased ability to concentrate at work.
- ✓ Reduced body fat and unwanted weight gain.
- ✓ A greater chance of staying in shape as you get older.
- ✓ Stronger immune system and faster recovery from illness.
- ✓ Improved digestion and bowel function.
- ✓ Less chance of developing diet related conditions such as diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.
- ✓ If you have one of these diet related conditions, then eating well at work will help you manage it better.
- ✓ You'll save money by planning ahead with your meals and snacks.



## Why it's not so easy to eat well at work

- ✗ Vending machines are often stocked with unhealthy food and drink choices.
- ✗ Catering at meetings provide few healthy food and drink options.
- ✗ Foods in workplace cafeterias often lack appealing, cheap, tasty food choices based on vegetables and fruit.
- ✗ Fundraising chocolates in the staff room (all the time!) are too tempting.
- ✗ Limited access to fresh water.
- ✗ Shift work can play havoc with metabolisms and appetite, not to mention poor availability of healthy food.
- ✗ "Sizzler syndrome" – self-selection facilities for employees can lead to overeating of the higher fat, higher kilojoule foods and unwanted weight gain.
- ✗ Lack of support and facilities for employees to be physically active at work.
- ✗ Long working hours and stress at work can lead to poor eating habits, such as eating on the run or at the office desk.
- ✗ Frequent travelling for work can mean low physical activity levels and the need to rely on takeaway foods, which are often high in fat, kilojoules and sugar.




Even just one of these factors may lead you (and your fellow employees) to over eat high fat, high sugar and high kilojoule foods. This can lead to unwanted weight gain, higher blood fats and cholesterol, blood pressure and other chronic disease risk factors.

Read on for ideas on how to [eatwell@work](#).

## How to eat better at work

Plan to eat well at work by beating those factors that make it hard for you to eat well. Here are some goals that may be relevant for you.

### Eat well...

- ✓ Eat a balanced diet that's high in fibre with lots of whole-grain bread and cereal, dried peas and beans, fruits and vegetables. See the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults  for more information.
- ✓ Don't eat at your desk. Aim to eat in a nice eating area (e.g. the lunchroom or outside).
- ✓ Eat your food slowly and enjoy it!
- ✓ Have a good breakfast so if you have a busy morning you won't experience a slump in sugar levels.
- ✓ Drink more water during the day. Keep a water bottle with you so you don't forget.



### Be prepared...

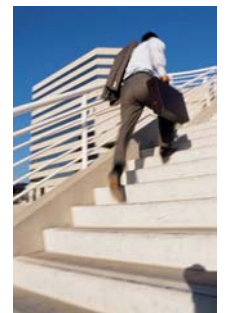
Bring your lunch to work. Try these ideas:

- ✓ Make extra serves when preparing the meal the night before and bring in the leftovers.
- ✓ Canned or carton soups (aim for low fat) and multigrain bread rolls.
- ✓ Keep small tins of baked beans or tinned fish and low fat wholegrain crackers in your office. This way you always have the makings of a meal.
- ✓ If you have access to a refrigerator at work then store tubs of low fat yoghurt, fresh fruit, raw vegetables, cottage or ricotta cheese, and low fat dips, such as hummus. Keep a loaf of wholegrain bread in the freezer too.



Plan ahead with snacks. Then you won't be tempted to don't grab high fat, high sugar snack foods when you run low in energy. Keep your desk or car packed with portable healthy snacks such as:

- ✓ Canned fruit.
- ✓ Low fat muesli bars.
- ✓ Low fat whole grain crackers.
- ✓ Rice cakes.
- ✓ Dried fruit.
- ✓ Cereal packets and small packs of UHT low fat milk.



### Be active...

- ✓ Use the stairs instead of lifts.
- ✓ Try to walk or cycle to work at least a couple of times a week (or if you live too far away, get out at lunchtimes).
- ✓ Get up and walk to your colleague's desk rather than just emailing them.



**If your workplace operates a cafeteria and/or a "self serve" system for meals then try to plan what you will have ahead of time.**

- ✓ Choose low fat options (e.g. stir-fry, chicken breast without the skin, grilled fish, vegetable based pastas).
- ✓ Fill up at least half your plate with vegetables.
- ✓ Steer clear of the fried, battered and crumbed foods such as chips or schnitzels.
- ✓ If you are going to have dessert, choose one that is based on fruit and/or low fat dairy products (e.g. low fat yoghurt or custard).

**If you are a shift worker you might also want to try the following:**

- ✓ Still aim for 3 meals a day with 2-3 snacks as needed.
- ✓ Eat lightly between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Avoid full meals and never eat a large meal straight before going to bed.
- ✓ Eat your main meal before starting work.
- ✓ Have a light meal or healthy snacks throughout your shift. Check out the **Be Prepared** section above.
- ✓ If you are going to eat after work and before you head off to bed, make it a light meal such as a sandwich, cereal and fruit or a bowl of soup.
- ✓ Avoid fatty, greasy and spicy foods, especially on the night shift.
- ✓ Eat slowly.
- ✓ Drink lots of water.
- ✓ Avoid or stop drinking alcohol and caffeine. Avoid caffeine at least six hours before the time you want to fall asleep.



**A word on dieting....**

Going on a diet to lose weight is often unsustainable and counterproductive. If you have a history of losing weight and then regaining it, you may be better off throwing away the scales. Focus instead on slowly changing your eating and physical activity habits. This will be more healthy and sustainable in the long run. Read on for how to set and achieve healthy lifestyle goals.

**Goal setting**

**Step 1:** Set yourself a goal for the week and monitor how you are going. For example:

- ❖ **Week 1 goal 1:** Bring in low fat afternoon tea snack at least 3 days this week. Write down how many times in week 1 you achieve this.
- ❖ **Week 1 goal 2:** Don't eat lunch at desk – eat it in the tearoom or outside.

**Step 2:** Gradually bring in other goals you want to achieve. Don't forget to keep going with your earlier goals too. Some examples of new goals might be:

- ❖ **Week 2 goal 3:** Ask lunch trolley to stock a multigrain chicken and salad roll with no butter or margarine.
- ❖ **Week 2 goal 4:** Drink at least 1 litre of water per day (water bottle on desk).

Keep a record of how you are going. For example:

Goal/ behaviour change	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	comment
<i>Week 1</i>						
<i>1. Bring in A/Tea</i>	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	<i>Forgot on Thur</i>
<i>2. Don't eat lunch at desk</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Week 2:</i>						
<i>1. Bring in A/Tea</i>	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	<i>Forgot Tues</i>
<i>2. Don't eat lunch at desk</i>	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	<i>Too busy</i>
<i>3. Ask café - special roll</i>	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	<i>Mon too short notice</i>
<i>4. Drink 1 litre+ water per day</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

**Step 3:** Involve other colleagues in eating well at work and being more physically active. For example: arrange for a bowl of fruit to be beside the fundraising chocolates, so people have a choice when the mid afternoon munchies hit. Better still, ask those who bring in the fundraising chocolates to consider healthier fundraising alternatives 📖. Ask your employer to look at this brochure for ideas on making the workplace more supportive for healthy eating.

**Step 4:** Keep it up! Keep monitoring your goal for at least 6 weeks, and then check again at 3 months and 6 months to see if you have maintained these healthier behaviours.

📖 See resources and links on the last page of this brochure.

Dear employer,

## Why eating well at work is important



Encouraging your employees to eat well at work will provide many benefits for your business.

- ✓ Employees who eat well at work will be healthier. Nutrition is one of the key factors preventing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.
- ✓ Reduced absenteeism
  - ❖ Healthier employees have fewer sick days.
  - ❖ A workplace wellness program can improve worker morale and reduce absenteeism.
- ✓ Increased employee productivity and greater job satisfaction
  - ❖ When a workplace improves conditions for its employees, such as making healthy choices available at work, it boosts worker morale, job satisfaction and productivity.
  - ❖ Healthy meal and snack breaks are a chance to rest and refuel to enable better concentration for the task at hand.
- ✓ Good corporate image and reputation
  - ❖ A company with healthier employees has a positive impact on its community and customers and can give a business that competitive edge.
  - ❖ A company that cares for its employees fosters stronger commitment and loyalty from employees.

Health promotion programs at work should be seen as an investment rather than a cost. For example Canadian research into cost-effectiveness of worksite health promotion programs show a return of \$1.75 to \$6.85 for every dollar spent.

Information sourced from:

- ❖ Food at Work: Workplace solutions for malnutrition, obesity and chronic diseases (2005). Christopher Wanjek. International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- ❖ Guide to Nutrition Promotion in the Workplace. 2002. Ontario Public Health Association. [www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating](http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating).

## Why it might not be easy for your employees to eat well at work

- × Vending machines are often stocked with unhealthy food and drink choices.
- × Catering at meetings provide few healthy food and drink options.
- × Foods in workplace cafeterias often lack appealing, cheap, tasty food choices based on vegetables and fruit.
- × Fundraising chocolates in the staff room (all the time!) are too tempting.
- × Limited access to fresh water.
- × Shift work can play havoc with metabolisms and appetite, not to mention poor availability of healthy food.
- × “Sizzler syndrome” – self-selection facilities for employees can lead to overeating of the higher fat, higher kilojoule foods and unwanted weight gain.
- × Lack of support and facilities for employees to be physically active at work.
- × Long working hours and stress at work can lead to poor eating habits, such as eating on the run or at the office desk.
- × Frequent travelling for work can mean low physical activity levels and the need to rely on takeaway foods, which are often high in fat, kilojoules and sugar.

Dear Employer

Even just one of these factors may lead your employees to overeat high fat, high sugar, and high kilojoule foods. This can lead to unwanted weight gain, higher blood fats and cholesterol, blood pressure and other chronic disease risk factors.

Read on for ideas on how to [eatwell@work](mailto:eatwell@work).

## Make it easier for your employees to eat well at work now

### Make it happen through consultation and policy development

- ✓ Consult with your staff.
  - Do they think healthy eating is important? Do they think it is difficult to eat well at work? If so, what are the barriers for them and what ideas do they have to make it easier?
- ✓ Get people on side.
  - Form a project team, talk with union representatives, and get a staff member to 'champion' the cause of eating well at work.
- ✓ Believe it can happen. Write a nutrition policy together with your employees.
  - This can be as simple as one page outlining what you want to achieve by making eating well at work easier, and how you are going to do it. Alternatively you may want to combine the nutrition policy with other health and wellbeing factors such as supporting physical activity in the workplace.

### Create a supportive workplace environment to make 'healthy food choices easy choices'


- ✓ If you have vending machines, ask the company to stock them with healthier food and drink items. These can include fresh, canned and dried fruits, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice; plain or mixed nuts, reduced fat snacks (aim for less than 10grams per 100grams) such as baked pretzels, low fat yoghurt and milk (plain or flavoured).
- ✓ All staff catering (for meetings etc) should meet healthy catering guidelines 📖.
- ✓ Provide a fresh fruit bowl in the meeting or lunch room (free or at cost price).
- ✓ Provide an alternative to the fundraising chocolates. Ask the charity or staff member who brings the chocolates in, to consider using a healthier fundraiser 📖. If the chocolate box doesn't disappear, then have the fresh fruit bowl standing right beside it so employees have a choice at snack time.
- ✓ Consider providing free or at cost alternatives to tea/coffee (such as herbal teas).
- ✓ Provide easy access to fresh water. This can be tap water, but think of a way to make it cool and inviting. For example, install a water filter or clay style cooler.
- ✓ Collaborate with nearby cafes, takeaways and other food vendors to offer healthy foods and promote nutritious specials at reasonable prices.
- ✓ Provide a dedicated eating area that is inviting, to encourage staff not to eat at their desks. Make sure this has a refrigerator, a microwave, toasted sandwich maker and other key items identified by staff.
- ✓ If you have a staff cafeteria, ask an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) 📖 to review your menu and advise on how to provide and promote healthy food and drink choices for staff. Or use the healthy catering guidelines 📖.
- ✓ If you have employees who do a lot of travel within the state, consider supplying eskies in all cars to help keep healthy food and drink options cool and safe. Another option would be to mark out cafes and takeaways that provide healthier options and provide employees with information on making healthier food choices when eating out 📖.



📖 See resources and links on the last page of this brochure.





Dear Employer

## Encourage your staff to be physically active

- ✓ Provide bike racks to encourage your staff to cycle to work (or even to and from meetings).
- ✓ Make your stairwell inviting and appealing (put up posters, cartoons, notices) and place motivational prompts at the lift encouraging staff to use the stairs.
- ✓ If possible, provide an exercise area for staff, including shower facilities.
- ✓ Explore discounted memberships at local health clubs.
- ✓ Start up a lunch-time walking group.
- ✓ For more ideas contact the Premiers Physical Activity Council, Tasmania .



## Provide incentives for staff to eat healthy foods

- ✓ Key messages that promote healthy eating should be based on the Dietary Guidelines for Australians and Australian Guide to Healthy Eating .
- ✓ Put up posters of delicious fresh produce or motivational posters about eating more vegetables or being more physically active, or distribute this information in staff newsletters or bulletin boards .
- ✓ Offer coupons for fruits and vegetables as rewards or have a “Walk to Work” day.
- ✓ Get in a nutrition professional (such as an Accredited Practising Dietitian)  to review your menu and provide nutrition education sessions for staff.
- ✓ Promote healthy eating during Heart Week or Nutrition Week. Ideas for nutrition activities are given on the websites of the Heart Foundation (for Heart Week) and Nutrition Australia (for Nutrition Week) .

### A word on workplace health competitions....

Competitions at work can be a fun way to motivate employees in relation to healthy behaviours. For example, groups of employees form teams to see who climb the most flights of stairs in a week or month.

However, competitions that focus on the most amount of weight lost may be counterproductive. This is because sometimes people use unhealthy ways to lose weight (such as fasting, following fad diets). The weight lost is often unsustainable and people can feel bad when the weight is regained. A much better idea is to focus on eating behaviour rather than weight loss.



## Some resources and links you may find useful:

### For Employees

These websites provide great nutrition information to help you with your healthy lifestyle plan.

**Eat Well Tasmania:** [www.eatwelltas.com.au](http://www.eatwelltas.com.au)

**Community Nutrition Unit**, Department of Health & Human Services:  
[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition)

**Nutrition Australia:** [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

**Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA):** Smart eating section.  
[www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)



**Australian Guide to Healthy Eating:**  
[www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm)

**Dietary Guidelines for Australians:** [www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/dietsyn.htm)

**Physical Activity guidelines:** [www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm)

### For Employers

**Eat Well Tasmania.** Our website has nutrition information with links to other sites and resources. Keep an eye on *News and events* for fruit and vegetable promotion ideas (including information and resources from the Go for 2&5<sup>®</sup> campaign, and hiring our fruit and veggie character costumes). [www.eatwelltas.com.au](http://www.eatwelltas.com.au) (03) 6223 1266.

**Community Nutrition Unit**, Department of Health & Human Services has a lending library of nutrition resources and a range of brochures (including advice on selecting healthier takeaway food items and healthy catering guidelines). Due to limited resources staff are unable to provide talks in the workplace but can provide advice on changing menus and promoting nutrition in the workplace. [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition) (03) 6222 7222.

**Nutrition Australia** provides nutrition information, including the *frequently asked questions* on it's website. It has also developed some workplace presentations on nutrition. [www.nutritionaustralia.org](http://www.nutritionaustralia.org)

**Heart Foundation** has developed healthy catering guidelines for workplace meetings and cafeterias. [www.heartfoundation.com.au](http://www.heartfoundation.com.au) (go to health and lifestyle, then nutrition, or search healthy catering guidelines).

**Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)** can provide information on how to access an APD (Accredited Practising Dietitian) in your area. An APD can run nutrition sessions for staff or review menus. [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

**The Parents and Friends Association of Tasmania** has developed the *Fruitful fundraising* directory, which provides healthy fundraising ideas. [www.parentsandfriendstasmania.asn.au/](http://www.parentsandfriendstasmania.asn.au/)

**Premier's Physical Activity Council.** Sport and Recreation Tasmania. Department of Economic Development. Provides information and advice on encouraging physical activity in the workplace. [www.physicalactivity.tas.gov.au](http://www.physicalactivity.tas.gov.au) (03) 6233 5621.

**City of Hamilton (Canada) Healthy workplace – healthy eating.** Has developed an excellent comprehensive guide to promoting nutrition in the workplace. This can be downloaded for free from: [www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating](http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating)