

## Food Fight

By Kim Dannies

“Once it hits the lips, it goes directly to the hips” is the rule of bum for most of the foods we find lurking in office kitchens. Food traps spring on us daily as colleagues arrive with doughnuts, hot bagels, or homemade chocolate chip cookies by the dozen. It’s always somebody’s birthday and who can say no to cake? And what about those free catered lunches? Unless we plan ahead, it’s guaranteed that we’ll be faced with less than ideal choices come the meal-time crunch. Factor in stress, deadlines, and spontaneous invitations, and we’re talking about a scale tipping tsunami. The facts are enough to turn your stomach: 65% of American are currently overweight or obese and as these numbers grow—by 2050—almost all Americans will be overweight according to James Hill director of the Colorado Clinical Nutrition Research Unit at the University of Colorado. Clearly we are at a nutritional fork in the road—are the food choices in your work environment supporting your goals for good health?

An important strategy is to plan meals out in advance. Don’t wait until you are starved to make healthy choices, it rarely works. I never thought I could stand to keep a food journal, but now I go on my-calorie-counter.com and take a few minutes to plan the day. I don’t always successfully stick to my carrot sticks, but a plan helps me steer around food traps and the numbers keep things real. It also gives me credit for daily expenditure of activity and exercise calories—the other side of the food equation. There are lots of food diary sites to choose from, just Google ‘calorie counter.’

You can be proactive by eating a smart breakfast every morning that includes combinations of whole grain cereals and breads, fruits, eggs, and non-fat dairy; around 300–350 calories. If you eat a sugary breakfast, studies show that you’ll eat a higher calorie lunch. Pack a lunch that gets you excited: make great sandwiches on interesting choices of whole grain or pumpernickel bread with turkey, tuna, or veggies & hummus and eat it around noon. (Avoid the “Wall Street Eating Syndrome”: delaying lunch until 4 pm and then binging.) Cut up fresh fruit and transport it in a recyclable plastic container, along with baby carrots, cucumbers, and grapes for munching throughout the day.

Plan workouts during the lunch break or take a walk if possible. Mid-day runners need a 300 calorie snack about two-hours before a workout to avoid crashing. When you arrive home on weeknights drink a glass of cranberry juice mixed with seltzer and eat an ounce

of dry roasted peanuts while you unwind, instead of defaulting to a cocktail hour loaded with snack foods. Dine a little earlier and then walk the dog (and your kids) around the block. You'll wake up feeling great, which will make it easier to continue a healthy eating routine the next day. By planning mindfully, you'll avoid eating mindlessly- the biggest food trap out there!

## Counterattacks to Food Traps

- **Buzz-bust:** caffeine dependence can be more complicated than just a bad headache. Folks hooked on java have a 30% higher chance of developing depression and anxiety and are 20% more prone to panic disorders. If you drink more than 6 -eight ounce cups daily the risk is even greater. Substitute water, lots of it. Herbal teas are fine, but leave the milk out- it inhibits the antioxidant value.
- **Dough-NOT do that to your hips!** The nutritional value of a doughnut is equal to the hole in it. Zero. Ask your office manager if fresh fruit can be featured in the snack area as well, or bring it yourself. Eat a smart breakfast at home and treat yourself to a healthy homemade muffin (the one you made on the weekend and froze) during the mid-coffee morning coffee break; recipe follows.
- **Fending the Vending Machine:** steer clear of the vending machine, period. Defend yourself by stocking a desk drawer with a healthy power bar for emergencies. I've tried them all, and love the organic Paley's Comet Bar best- it's intensely flavorful and satisfying. Developed by a chef/cyclist it's like dessert at 180 calories, but the bar can keep me going all day ([www.paleybar.com](http://www.paleybar.com)). What to pick from a windowed wall of bad choices in a dire emergency? Go for the nuts or trail mix- yes, they'll be higher in calories, but the food value will compensate for it in a tight spot. Adjust calorie counts accordingly at the very next meal.
- **Cake in the Conference Room!** If you've made the rational decision that a trans-fat infested blob of white flour and sugar is in your best interests at 4pm, then go for it- but remember, Portions People! Have just a little bit and enjoy it. Otherwise, your strategy can involve brewing a cup of tea with a dash of honey before heading down to watch Amanda blow out the candles.
- **Road Kill:** does a long day of business travel or eating in restaurants bump you off the road to good nutrition? If you are driving, pack a small cooler with all of the good choices you already know; drink lots of water. Flying? Bring along some homemade granola,

and purchase water and low-fat yogurt after clearing security. Your best bet ordering from a menu include egg white omelets, shellfish, sushi, lean cuts of beef or chicken, and fresh green salads with dressing on the side.

- **Hydrate or Die:** 75% of American are chronically dehydrated. When you become dehydrated the thirst mechanism is so weak it is mistaken for hunger; even mild dehydration will slow down metabolism by 3%. A mere 2% drop in body water can trigger fuzzy short-term memory, trouble with basic math and difficulty focusing on the computer screen or printed page. Drinking 5 glasses of water a day decreases the risk of colon cancer by 45%; it slashes the risk of breast cancer by 79% and bladder cancer by 50%. Are you drinking lots of water everyday?

Check out Eating Well.com (May/June 2007) to read about innovative employers who are putting their money where their spoon goes and creating healthy options for workplace meal-times.

## Morning Rush Muffins

These are great for a pre-work out snack or around 4 pm when the body demands something sweet.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a mixing bowl stir together 3 cups old fashioned oats, 1 cup non-fat buttermilk, 3 tablespoons canola oil, 2 eggs, one fourth cup light brown sugar, one fourth cup molasses, 1 ripe smashed banana. Let batter rest for 5 minutes. Gently stir in 1 cup white whole wheat flour and 1 tablespoon of baking powder. Fill 12 prepared muffin tins. Divide 1 cup blueberries, raspberries, or chopped apple among the muffins using a chop stick to gently incorporate. Top with a sprinkle of oats and nuts. Bake 25 minutes. Freeze extras in individual plastic bags until ready to grab and go.

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