

Lifestyle Health Fitness

Fix your health in your lunch break: 10 tips that can make a big difference

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A study of 1,000 UK workers revealed that 80% of employees don't get enough exercise because they can't find time for it in the week

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If you work full time, your lunch break is probably sacred.

But how often do you spend that precious hour at your desk, munching a mayo-heavy sandwich and barely tearing your eyes from your computer screen?

Recent research found that half of office workers feel more stimulated after going out for lunch. Yet only 15% actually leave their desk.

The study of 1,000 UK workers, by health brand Fitbit, revealed that 80% of employees don't get enough exercise because they can't find time for it in the week.

Astonishingly, a fifth of workers never step out of the office at all during the working week.

You're not alone if you feel chained to your desk but small changes can make a big difference.

Mind your mess

Finding it difficult to think straight surrounded by all those mouldy cups and stuck behind all those piles of paperwork? Use your lunch hour to tidy your desk and give yourself a mental boost.

"Your mind's subconscious doesn't discriminate between positive or negative," says mind therapist Ally Davies. "It defines your current state of mind and affects how you act.

So messy spaces produce a muddled mind while a tidy desk brings clarity.

Time to finally sort out that filing you've been putting off for the last few weeks then...

Swap your sarnie

Your packed lunch could be seriously affecting your waistline if it's laden with calories.

"Aim to eat low glycaemic index (GI) foods, which contain slow release carbohydrates such as wholegrain bread, brown rice and pasta," says nutritionist Dr Sam Christie.

By swapping a tuna and mayonnaise baguette (535 calories), for an egg sandwich made with wholemeal bread (270 calories), you'll save 265 calories. Or save 136 by having a 100g pot of houmous (187) with a large mixed salad (222).

Ditch the coffee

You may love your creamy latte at lunch but it's probably not doing you much good.

Changing your order from a large latte (280 calories) to a calorie-free green tea means you can save 280 calories.

"Green tea is less likely to give you that afternoon slump as there's less of a blood sugar 'peak and trough' effect due to the lower caffeine content," according to Dr Christie. It also protects you against degenerative diseases if drunk regularly.

If you hate green tea, swap your latte for a mug of tea with milk (20 calories), which means a saving of 260 calories. Ordinary tea has all the health benefits of green tea too, when consumed daily. Just go easy on the sugar.

Stay active, keep fit

Sitting down at work all day can have dire consequences for your figure – and your health. Research has shown that going on a power walk daily can halve the risk of a heart attack. Government says that we should aim for 20 minutes cardiovascular exercise a day.

"Exercising at lunchtime can energise you," says fitness expert, Janey Holliday. "It means you're less likely to succumb to the afternoon munchies. Many gyms run express classes if you don't have much time."

Work out at work

If you really can't get out to exercise, bring your fitness regime inside. No need to limber up in a leotard at your desk but it is possible to do some sneaky exercises without getting funny looks from the people around you.

"Ab pull-ins are one of the best ways to strengthen abs," says Janey.

Sitting straight in your chair, pull your abs in by tightening them. Hold for five seconds and then repeat 20 times.

"If you're brave enough, you could even try doing some inner thigh squeezes with a medicine ball under your desk!" she adds.

Take a screen break

If you work on a computer all day, getting regular screen breaks – especially at lunchtime – could save your eyesight. Screens subject your eyes to flicker and glare, which can cause myopia or shortsightedness.

Staring at the screen can also cause blurred vision, double vision, dry and red eyes, headaches and neck and back pain.

"It's important to take a screen break and look at other objects at varying distances," says Carolyn Norman from Boots Opticians. "You should also blink often to keep the eyes moist."

Sun substitutes

You won't get your recommended dose of vitamin D spending all day indoors. It's thought a quarter of adults have levels too low to sustain healthy bones, risking fractures. Nothing can replace getting out into the sunshine, but adjusting your diet can help.

"Eggs and mackerel are very rich in vitamin D," says dietician Dr Carrie Ruxton. New Calin+ yoghurts also contain the full recommended daily dose.

You could also try a supplement such as Nature's Best Vitamin D 1000iu

Trade your chocolate

If you can't resist the allure of chocolate at lunchtime, think of the long-term effects it could have on your figure.

Swap a Mars bar (260 calories) for a medium-sized banana (95 calories) and save 165 calories. Do it every day for a month and you'll have lost up to 4lb.

If you're addicted to fizzy pop, why not try a fruit smoothie instead? "The micronutrients in a smoothie mean that it's better for you than a can of cola," says nutritionist Dr Sam Christie.

Take the stairs

We don't just use calories by exercising. Non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT) is the energy used for everything other than sleeping, eating or conventional exercise.

By going for a stroll around the shops at lunch, you could use around 30 calories in 'neat' energy.

"Climbing the stairs every day could tally up, over a month, to the equivalent of a step class," says Janey.

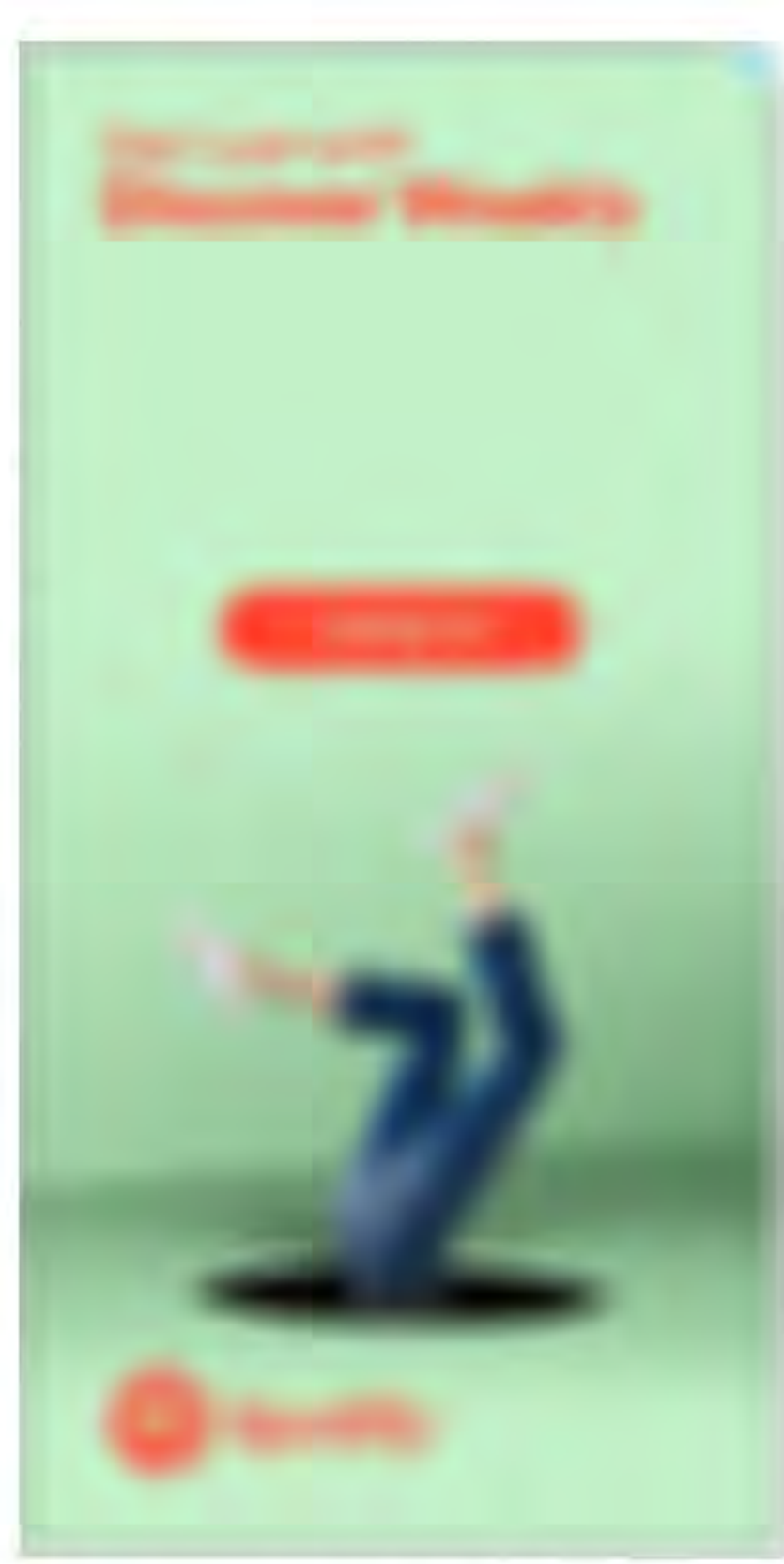
The Fitbit Zip Wireless Activity Tracker tracks steps, distance and calories burned, before syncing the stats to your iPhone

Just do nothing

At lunchtime, find a park bench and watch the world go by "You might think you can just rest your body but you must never forget to calm your mind," says mind therapist Ally Davies.

"A clear mind gives a feeling of fearlessness, confidence and clarity. Don't feel guilty about taking your lunch break. It's your time."

By Louise Baty



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