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## Why Taking a Lunch Break Can Boost Your Career

By [Kristin Colella](#)

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) — Be honest: how many days each week do you actually take a lunch break? While you might think that working through lunch will show your boss that you're a model employee, skipping a much-needed midday break might actually have the opposite effect by wearing you out.

"A lunch break is important for your physical and mental health," says psychologist Frank J. Sileo, executive director for [The Center for Psychological Enhancement](#) in Ridgewood, N.J. "Studies have shown that taking a lunch break can reduce stress. Time for relaxation away from work has also been correlated with heightened productivity and creativity."

If you generally work through lunch or only take a short break, you're not alone. According to a [recent survey](#) by OfficeTeam, a global staffing service, nearly half (48%) of U.S. workers said their typical lunch break lasts 30 minutes or less.

However, experts say that lunch breaks should ideally be at least 30 to 45 minutes—and strongly advise spending that time away from your desk.

"When you eat at your desk, it does not really constitute a real break from work and may involve doing a host of work-related tasks such as answering the phone and responding to emails while eating," says Sileo. "Eating at your desk may also lead to overeating, because when you are working at your desk you may not pay attention to what and how much you are eating."

When choosing what to eat for lunch, avoid sugary, greasy foods and instead opt for a nutritious, well-balanced meal.

"We advocate eating low-carb, high natural fat foods that help maintain blood sugar levels and minimize stress," says John Salerno, M.D., director of [The Salerno Center for Complementary Medicine](#) in New York City.

Aside from eating, beneficial activities to enjoy during your lunch break include taking a walk, working out at the gym or going to a quiet room to practice yoga or meditation, says stress and mindful living consultant Kathleen Hall, founder and CEO of [The Mindful Living Network](#) and [The Stress Institute](#).

However you fill your time, it's best to keep your lunch break under an hour.

"Too long a lunch can be counterproductive since it will take too much time to get back to focusing on the work at hand," Salerno says.

When it comes to socializing at lunch, there's no one-size-fits-all answer to whether it's best to take your break alone or enjoy time with others.

"Some people are able to relax, refresh, recharge and refocus in a group, with an active conversation going on around them, while others find that setting stressful and unhelpful," says Dike Drummond, M.D., a family practice physician and CEO of [TheHappyMD.com](#), which provides burnout treatment and coaching to doctors. "You decide, and it is up to you to get what you need in the short time you have."

If you're not able to leave the office for a lunch break on a busy day, there are ways you can still clear your mind and reduce stress. Consider taking short breaks throughout the day to avoid burnout, preserve energy and allow physical and mental relaxation to occur, suggests endocrinologist and internal medicine doctor Joseph Pinzone, M.D., medical director of [Amai Clinic](#) in Santa Monica, Calif.

"From a health perspective, the worker should take a break about every 90 minutes and stretch and do some in-place exercise, get a drink of water or talk casually with co-workers," says Pinzone.

If you're a manager and your employees are not able to take lunch or dinner breaks during busy times, consider ordering food for them to the office to make the workday smoother for them.

"If the team is experiencing an especially hectic period, having lunch or dinner brought in may be a nice gesture," says Robert Hosking, executive director of [OfficeTeam](#). "People may not feel like they have time to leave the office, but management is making it easier for them to take a break to eat."

The bottom line: if you're allowed to take a lunch break, fight the guilt and give your mind and body the much-needed reprieve from the hectic workday. You'll likely find that your performance and overall happiness will improve.

—Written by [Kristin Colella](#) for [MainStreet](#)

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