



Move it, girls: Line dancing isn't required, but exercise breaks can liven up your workday.

The feel-good office

Fed up with backaches and coffee breaks? Here's how to make your office a healthy oasis. *By Arianne Cohen*

Vacation's over, you're back at work, and already you're dog-tired and starving. Instead of hitting the vending machine for chips, join your coworkers in the conference room for 15 minutes of yoga and seltzer sipping. Twenty minutes later, you'll be back in your work groove, energized.

Think that will never happen? Don't believe it. Although returning to the

daily grind can mean restarting your unhealthy habits (the kind that can boost your risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes, according to a recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*), experts say it's easy to transform your office into a healthy oasis. Here's your to-do list.

✓ **Take booster breaks.** Wendell Taylor, PhD, proposed the idea

of "booster breaks" in a recent *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* paper after reading an e-mail thread from coffee-loving comrades. "There were 50 e-mails debating whether the coffee should be caffeinated or noncaffeinated, who would pay, and who would provide cream," he says. "No one mentioned anything healthy."

Taylor, associate professor of health promotion and behavioral sciences at

The feel-good office *continued*

the University of Texas–Houston, wants to change that by helping employees and companies make 15-minute booster breaks a reality. They might involve stretching, meditation, stair-climbing, walking, or Tai Chi. But he says they have to be scheduled at least once a day (preferably twice), have company support, and, if it's a physical activity like Tai Chi, be run by someone with experience. Why? Most people don't get away from their desks unless their coworkers do, too. But when breaks are on the calendar and peer pressure kicks in, you're more likely to get moving. And it's worth it: Studies show that taking exercise breaks reduces health-care costs, sick days, fatigue, anger, and depression. For more useful tips and resources, just go to www.boosterbreak.com.

✓ **Baby your body.** Try the following strategies to save yourself the pain of reaching for files at an awkward angle, scrunching your neck to hold the phone, slouching, or just forgetting to take a break from your computer:

- Arrange all objects and files you reach for regularly below shoulder height and as close to you as possible. Be sure to turn your chair in the direction you're reaching.
- Ask your boss for a phone headset, which allows you to keep your head and neck in a natural position.
- Sit squarely over the bones in your butt, with shoulders over your hips, eyes facing slightly downward, and neck and shoulders relaxed.
- Stretch your wrists every hour or two if you work regularly on a computer. How? Put your hands together in a prayer position and press firmly.

To find more moves you can do in your chair, go to www.ergonomicsnow.com.au and click on "Exercises."

How to avoid office food follies

Why do those jelly-filled temptations (or every other high-calorie treat ever invented) constantly end up in the office? Often, the company's to blame: muffins for early meetings, bagels on deadline, and cakes for celebrations. TV's *The Office* put its own spin on the trend: The boss "eased" staff frustration about a lame health-insurance plan with ... ice-cream sandwiches. How do you prevent your workday from becoming a fat-filled sitcom? Try these three tricks.

Choose a new route. Make a habit of avoiding "sweet spots." If your next-door cohort keeps

her candy dish full, catch up with her in the break room or another spot.

Pack healthy treats. Yogurt (even the chocolate kind) or fruit are filled with good-for-you nutrients and can help satisfy most candy cravings. If you're too busy to bring your own, cut a deal with a coworker: You'll supply a healthy lunch for two plus snacks one week, if she'll return the favor.

Indulge and back off. Keep the calories down and energy up by alternating each cup of coffee or can of soda with a cup of water or herbal tea. Also, every other day, sub in a

handful of nuts, grapes, or carrot sticks for that package of chips. Your body won't forget the good deed.



✓ **Just stop.** Research shows you will be less stressed and more productive if you stop working for 5 to 10 minutes every couple of hours (and these pauses should be in addition to booster breaks). Use the time to just sit back and put your feet up. Or try cleaning that messy corner, reading a newspaper, or listening to music. Remind yourself to do it by setting an alarm in your e-mail calendar.

✓ **Leave work at work.** You spend more than a third of your life at work. But that's not enough for a lot of people, and they pay for it. A recent

study in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* showed that employees who take their work home—literally and figuratively—feel more tired, grumpy, angry, and irritated. But leaving the office on time and enjoying themselves in the evening had the opposite effect, leading to more success at work. Tonight, take a mental break and try planning your next vacation. 📌

Arianne Cohen has also contributed to Real Simple, The New York Times, and New York. Her book, Help, It's Broken! A Fix-It Bible for the Repair-Impaired, was published in 2005.