



BRITISH COLUMBIA SAFETY COUNCIL'S

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# Safety First

Online Newsletter, Spring 2006

## Give Bacteria the Pink Slip

The lunch hour has shrunk. What was once a 60-minute break for most workers is now 30 minutes or less for more than half of all employees (53 percent\*).

Even then, lunch is more likely to be al desko than al fresco. In fact, desks are doing double duty for more than just lunch: 57 percent of survey respondents say they snack at their desks and nearly one in three eats breakfast there, too. A small percentage (11 percent\*) even dine desktop for dinner.

However, while shorter lunch hours may result in workers logging more hours, it may also be causing them to log in additional sick days, as desktops harbour bacteria, which can lead to food-borne illness.

Workday demands can make it almost impossible to think about proper food safety, but as desktops continue to replace kitchen tables as a place to eat meals, it is important to follow food safety steps at the office.

### The Dirt on Desktops

Survey results show more than three out of four workers only occasionally clean their desktops before eating - and 20 percent never do! What's more, 95 percent of workers say they neglect to clean their computer keyboard and mouse daily, though they are often eating while working at their computers. One in three clean them less than once a month and 11 percent say they never clean them at all.

The majority of illness-causing bacteria are spread through your hands. Not surprising when you consider everything on your desktop gets touched by either you or someone else. A clean desktop is your best defence against food-borne illnesses.

- ❑ Food safety tip: Prevent bacteria from spoiling your desktop dining experience by supplying yourself with cleaning products such as antibacterial wipes, sprays and paper towels, at your desk.
- ❑ Food safety tip: Keep moist towelettes or antibacterial soap nearby so you can wash your hands before eating.

## Corporate Sharing

For many, eating at work is not limited to meals. According to the survey, birthdays rank first as the most popular occasion for sharing food in the workplace, followed closely by the winter holiday season and meetings. However, while sharing food can be a nice break, it also can serve as a breeding ground for harmful bacteria if proper food safety procedures are not followed.

According to the survey, nearly four out of five office workers say shared foods sit out for more than two hours, and 44 percent say food sits out all day or until it is finished.

Perishable foods like pizza, cold cuts, dips, salads and sandwiches should never sit out for more than two hours, at which point harmful bacteria begin to multiply rapidly and your risk of food-borne illness increases significantly.

## After Hours Eat-iquette

According to the ADA, more than half of all office employees work more than eight hours a day, with two in five people clocking in as many as 10 hours - 14 percent even say it's not unusual for them to work more than 10 hours a day.

As work hours extend past the standard "dinner hour," many employees hunger for after-hours meal solutions. More than a third of office workers (35 percent\*) order in dinner or pick up carryout from a restaurant. Another 30 percent head for office vending machines for snacks and 20 percent say they wander the office looking for foods left over from meetings or office celebrations.

- ❑ Food safety tip: If you typically work late, keep a drawer full of non-perishable foods-such as peanut butter, shelf-stable pudding cups, whole fruit, popcorn or sunflower seeds-to keep your energy up safely.
- ❑ Food safety tip: When reheating leftovers for another meal, heat foods to an internal temperature of 74 degrees Celsius (even if you microwave it) and use a meat thermometer to make sure.

For more information, visit [Home Food Safety](#) or [Canadian Dieticians](#)

The ADA educates consumers that home food safety is a serious issue and provides solutions to safely handle food in their own kitchens. This program complements government sponsored food safety initiatives that speak to the leading critical food-handling violations by emphasizing the following four key messages:

- 1) Wash hands often;
- 2) Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate;
- 3) Cook to proper temperatures; and
- 4) Refrigerate promptly below 4 degrees Celsius.

\* Source of statistics: ADA.