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7 expert-backed strategies to avoid overeating when you're working from home

BY BARBARA BRODY

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Stocking up on nutritious foods is one way to avoid overeating when you work from home.

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There's little doubt that the COVID pandemic has drastically shifted how and where we do our jobs. For many people, "going to work" no longer means settling into a cubicle or corner office for the day; instead, your commute might take you only as far as your home office or dining room table.

If you're continuing to work from home even part-time, you likely appreciate the flexibility that this arrangement brings. But the downsides—like noisy gardeners and small children interrupting important [Zoom](#) meetings—are equally real. Another potential con: nonstop grazing throughout the day.

Sure, the traditional office model carried its share of food-related temptations—free snacks in the break room, pastry-filled morning meetings, and supersize birthday cupcakes. But for many people, eating healthfully at home is an even greater challenge simply because of the easy access to your refrigerator and pantry.

“When you go to the office, you probably have breakfast first, and maybe you pack your lunch and some snacks, so you might have a few specific foods on hand. But it would be very unusual to have a full kitchen with you,” says Ginger Hultin, a Seattle-based RDN (registered dietitian nutritionist) at [Champagne Nutrition](#). “Now, all your favorite foods are right there.”

If you’ve gained weight since you started working from home or find yourself mindlessly snacking all the time, help is here. Ahead, seven easy tips to help you from overeating at home.

1. Pause before you eat

Food is fuel for your body, and feeling hungry is a clue that you’re running low. But if you’ve been overeating, chances are that hunger isn’t the only thing driving you to the kitchen again and again. The next time you think about getting up for a snack, consider whether you’re really hungry or if you might be bored, stressed, or lonely.

“I teach clients to pause and rate their hunger on a scale of one to 10,” with 10 being famished and one being not at all hungry. “Tune into where you are, and then decide if you need a meal or snack. If you’re only at a one, two, or three, you probably don’t need to eat,” says Hultin.

2. Schedule nonfood breaks

When you’re stressed or bored, but not actually hungry, refill your water bottle, take a quick walk around the block, pet your dog, stand up and stretch, or message with a friend for a few minutes.

Don’t let food become a substitute for clearing your head, says Dena Champion, an RDN with [the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center](#). “Some people don’t take breaks like they would in an office setting. I know I still have to remind myself it’s okay to do this.”

3. Take a real lunch break

Working from home tends to be a loose, unstructured affair. You might send emails while still in your pajamas or throw in a load of laundry in the middle of the day. There’s nothing wrong with that in theory, but it can also shift you out of your previous eating pattern.

“It’s really important to structure your time and incorporate self-care,” says New York–based integrative RDN [Robin Foroutan](#). Your at-home work schedule should include some exercise, a tech-free break (even if it’s short), and regularly scheduled meals—including lunch.

4. Pack your lunch

If you don’t have time to prepare a midday meal or go out for a walk and grab a salad from a nearby restaurant, consider planning and prepping lunch every evening or morning.

“I noticed when I was suddenly working from home that I was waiting until I was hungry for lunch and then trying to come up with something to make, and I was grabbing snack foods because I didn’t have a good plan,” says Champion. “Now when I work from home, I have a lunch that I make the night before—just like I would if I were going into the office. This helps ensure I have a nutrient-dense lunch that is ready to go. Plus it saves time during my busy day.”

5. Stock up on nutritious, filling foods

Snacking isn’t a bad thing, even if you’re doing it frequently. The key is that you’re eating when you’re actually hungry and that you’re choosing [nutritious foods](#). While chips are okay on occasion, whole-wheat toast with avocado or peanut butter, fruit salad, or a small smoothie are far better options. These items contain way more nutrients than typical snack foods, including some fiber and/or protein that will help keep you feeling full for longer.

Again, a little planning also goes a long way: “Be sure to have plenty of healthy, nutrient-dense options ready to go, [such as] fruit and veggies in the fridge that are washed and chopped so they are easy to grab,” says Champion.

6. Portion out foods you tend to overdo

When it comes to foods that are easy to overeat, “portioning them out is really critical,” says Hultin. Take a serving, put it in a bowl or plate, and put the family-size package back in the pantry.

7. Eat more mindfully

Numerous [studies](#) have found that people who eat mindfully—meaning that they slow down and focus on their food while minimizing outside distractions—are less likely to consume large quantities in a short period. Mindful eaters are also more likely to eat only when they’re hungry versus bored or stressed and to feel more satisfied afterward.

During a busy workday, it's not always possible to fully disconnect and focus on your food, but if you can spare the time it's worth it, says Hultin. "Ideally, you should sit down and enjoy your food, and focus on the tastes, smells, and feel of it, even if it's just for five minutes."



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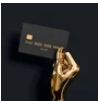
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