

Keep your cool: Safety tips for office eaters

COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

Approximately 70 percent of Americans regularly eat at their desks. This isn't a great idea, according to the American Dietetic Association and ConAgra Foods Foundation.

Here are some tips to stay healthy if you decide to dine at your desk during the workday:

■ **Keep your cool:** More than two out of three desktop diners bring perishable food items for lunch, including sandwiches, fruit, vegetables and leftovers, which can

spoil after being unrefrigerated for more than two hours. Store your brown bag in the office refrigerator as soon as you get to work. If you don't have a refrigerator, pack your lunch in an insulated lunch bag with an ice pack.

■ **Follow fridge safety:** According to the ADA/ConAgra Foods survey, 44 percent of office refrigerators are cleaned out only once a month, and 22 percent are cleaned just once or twice a year. Yet most perishable foods have a shelf

life of just three to five days. Don't wait for the cleanup crew to throw out your leftovers. Label and date your food and make sure to toss it in a timely fashion.

■ **Avoid corporate sponging:** When it comes to washing dishes at the office, nearly one in three people use a "community sponge" to clean their plates — a potentially dangerous habit if sponges aren't properly maintained. A damp, smelly sponge is a sign of bacteria, and rinsing a sponge with water isn't enough to keep it clean.

Instead, use paper towels and hot soapy water.

■ **Manage the microwave:** It isn't unusual to open the workplace microwave and see dried-up, splattered food on the inside walls. More than half of all employees — 53.4 percent — say the microwave in their office kitchen is cleaned only once a month or less. Be courteous when microwaving meals, and if food splatters, wipe down the microwave immediately.

■ **Clock in carry-out:** When bringing carry-out back to

your desk, don't wait too long before eating it or you could put yourself at risk of illness. So put your food in the office refrigerator until you are ready to eat.

Make the most of your desktop dining experience by stocking up on food safety supplies such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes or paper towels and spray cleanser, labels for leftovers and a thermometer to test the temperature of your foods. Remember to reheat leftover lunch foods to an internal temperature of 165 degrees.

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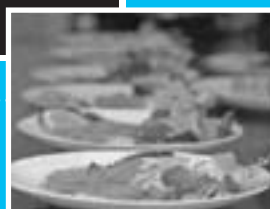


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