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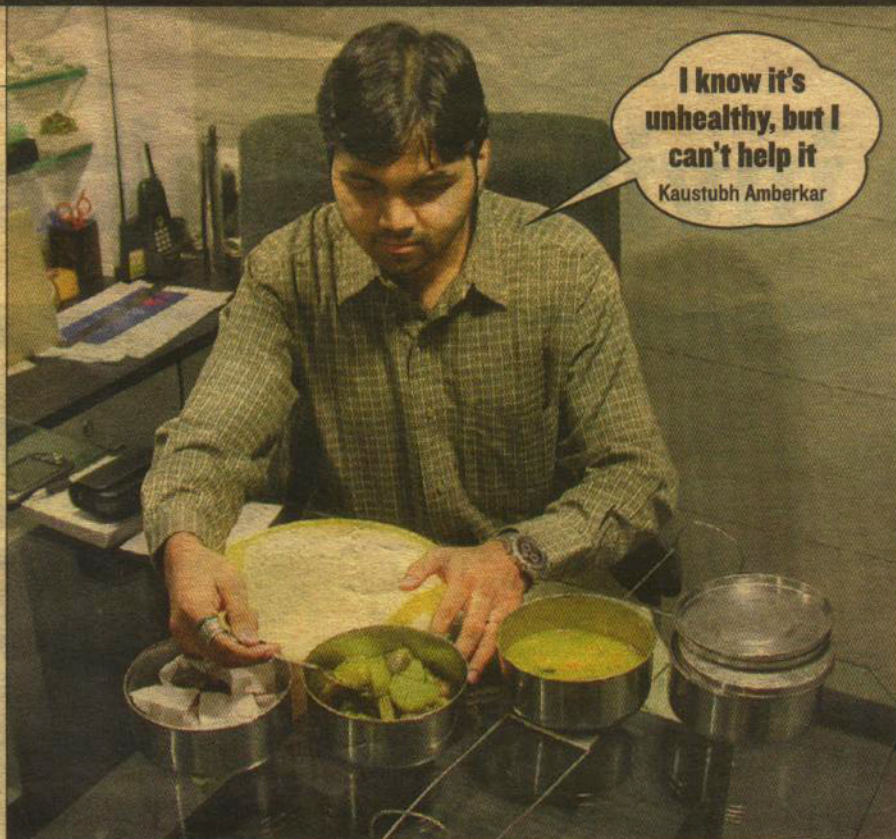
One eye on chapati other on laptop

LUNCH@WORK

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With professionals trying to squeeze in more duties into a single working day, taking out half an hour for lunch is now a luxury. LiFE@WORK tells you why, apart from creating a bacteria buffet in your cubicle, dining "Al desko" is a bad idea



You are at your desk, racing against a deadline, when hunger pangs set in. You pick up the phone, press a button (you have your favourite fast food chain on speed dial, of course) and order in.

Or, you open your dabba, and attack your khaana, while you are still working. You answer that unavoidable business call while digging into your salad, and reply to that all-important e-mail while slurping dal.

If your only lunch companions are your phone and computer, you've got a problem. Quick desktop dining is fast replacing hour-long leisurely lunch breaks for corporates like Kaustubh Amberkar, partner at Kavideep Prints.

"I'm into printing, and since clients call or show up any time, my lunch takes a beating," admits Kaustubh, with one eye on the clock. "The trouble of eating at my desk is that I end up answering calls or working on my laptop. I know it's unhealthy, but I can't help it," he shrugs.

On days when Kaustubh isn't carrying a home-cooked meal, he orders in a salad and a brown bread sandwich. "Sometimes, you just can't avoid junk," he says, throwing a look at his microwave, and in house crockery stock.

Hinduja Hospital's chief dietitian, Jyoti Lalwani, confirms the trend. "I have CEOs and MDs of top companies citing lack of time as the reason for desktop dining," she says. This dining trend is growing rapidly in the US too, where it has been termed "Al Desko".

If you must dine at your desk

JYOTI LALWANI says it is important to work out a healthy working lunch. "If you are eating at your desk, consult a nutritionist and get a healthy meal plan."

► Put your phone off the hook and turn your computer off.

► Invite colleagues to eat with you.

► Play a little music to lighten the mood.

► Make sure you MB-EAT. This stands for Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training. New research indicates that becoming more mindful of every mouthful, is a powerful way to reduce food intake, increase meal satisfaction, and savour more than just the taste of your veggies.

► Wipe your desk with a disinfectant, every day.



JYOTI LALWANI, Chief dietitian at Hinduja Hospital

6 reasons why your AL DESKO needs a MAKEOVER

Affects digestion and absorption

"For smooth digestion, it's important to focus on what you are eating — taste, texture and aroma, and to chew food well," Jyoti points out. Since the digestive system is connected with our psychological system, nutrients from food are better utilised when you eat in a calm state of mind.

Adds to stress

Eating in the same setting where you work, is responsible for increased stress levels. Eating in a cafeteria or a designated lunch area, will allow you to relax and enjoy your meal.

Puts you in a time warp

Dining at your desk puts you in a time warp, where eating patterns and habits are irregular. "Most people who eat at their desk, don't listen to their body. They eat when they are free, not when they are hungry. That's how eating patterns get messed up," says Jyoti.

Bacteria buffet

A study by the University of Arizona found that a typical worker's desk has hundreds of times more bacteria per square inch, than an office toilet seat. Desks, phones and other private surfaces are also prime habitats for viruses that cause colds and flu. Eating in a cleaner environment is not only healthier, but also more hygienic.

Junk food risk

When you eat at your desk, it is difficult to balance a dabba, and bother with dal, sabzi, rice and all the rest. "That is why desktop diners are more prone to ordering junk food. Take-away boxes are easier and less messy to eat out of, but terribly unhealthy," says Jyoti.

Makes you a loner

Eating alone at your desk means not interacting with colleagues in a different atmosphere. You are cutting out an opportunity to connect and share. Researchers at the University of Maryland say that tremendous creativity is released when people solve common or related problems, get together and schmooze.

Al desko etiquette

KEEP IT SIMPLE. If you eat at your desk, steer clear of messy foods that must be eaten with your hands.

DON'T BE A COW: Don't chew your food noisily, or answer the phone and talk with a mouthful of food.

NO SMELLY FOOD: Be courteous and choose foods that don't waft through the office.

CLEAN UP AFTER YOURSELF: Do not let food stains and dirty napkins lie around your desk, once you are done.

THROW OUT LEFTOVERS: Don't allow leftovers to lie on your desk until the next day.