

YOUR INBOX ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT'S BEEN GETTING STUFFED.

# The Office 15

Can we get a big “ugh!” for the corporate version of the Freshman 15? Almost half of employees say they’ve put on weight at their present job, with women more likely than men to pile on the pounds. To help you achieve work-waist balance, we rounded up the most likely culprits—and the easiest solutions.

By Lisa Marshall

## YOUR COWORKERS

**#1. The Junk-Food Pusher.** About a third of dieting employees say their colleagues influence them to eat more or to choose less-healthy options—here’s looking at you, candy-bowl colleague and doughnut-toting meeting leader. And if just one of your office buds is obese, your own risk doubles. (In comparison, even your spouse’s weight problem has only a 44 percent chance of rubbing off on you.)

**The Fix:** We eat twice as much when food is in our direct line of sight, according to research by Brian Wansink, Ph.D, author of *Slim By Design*. So take a seat at whatever end of the conference table is farthest from that box of doughnuts, and map your route to the ladies’ room to avoid strolling by the sweets dish at reception. Another strategy: Plan ahead to treat yourself at least once a week. “If you feel like you’re constantly missing out, it’s going to start seeming like deprivation and can lead to mindless overindulging later,” says Jennifer Bruning, R.D.N., a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

**#2. Your Work Wife/Lunch Buddy.** We eat 30 percent more, on average, when we’re with another person, notes Wansink. That’s because we tend to mimic our companion’s order, and then linger, getting dessert or picking at the plate when we’re no longer hungry—all while chatting, so we pay less attention to what (and how much) we’re eating.

**The Fix:** Pack your own lunch, and then convene with friends in the conference room rather than eating over your desk, so you’re still breaking bread socially—a mood lifter in itself. A recent study in the journal *Obesity* found that people who noshed prepackaged, portion-controlled meals for lunch and dinner dropped more pounds (an average of 18 in 12 weeks) than those who relied on other methods. If you do go out, make a pact with your lunch crew to splurge one day a week but eat healthy the others.



recover from angsty situations. Hit up the office Keurig or listen to a 10-minute guided mindfulness meditation app (Buddhify is a good one for newcomers). Even if it's only for a minute or two, try to take one of these breaks every hour and a half—research has found that focus and energy start to wear thin after that amount of time. If you really crave a snack, try a square or two of dark chocolate, which has been shown to lower stress hormones like cortisol.

**#2. Your Packed Calendar.** It's a double whammy: A stressful job leads to a lack of personal time, which then steals your best weapons for fighting said stress—namely, a nutritious diet and exercise. Only one in five employees regularly takes an actual lunch break, with most snarfing something down over their keyboard or skipping the meal altogether, according to career placement firm Right Management. Meanwhile, 45 percent of survey respondents said they are “too tired” from work to exercise afterward, and only 18 percent hit the gym or take a walk at lunch.

**The Fix:** On days when you know you'll be rushing from one task to the next, start with a hearty meal: A recent study found that eating half your day's calories at breakfast can help you lose twice as much weight as eating that many at dinner. Then pack portable, protein-rich snacks to keep your blood sugar steady and appetite in check midday (think hummus and carrots; nut butter with celery; turkey jerky).

As for exercise when you don't have much time, research has shown women can burn up to 700 additional calories per day via “nonexercise activity thermogenesis,” like taking the stairs and parking farther from the office. Try a standing desk if you can get one—you burn more on your feet than on your tush—and create your own stand-sit routine (say, up for 20 minutes, down for eight to 10). To work more movement into your day, use the printer on the other side of the office (some companies are moving communal equipment to a central locale to inspire quick strolls) or take the long way to the kitchen. ■

## YOUR ENVIRONMENT

**#1. The Thermostat.** A third of women say they feel constantly cold at work—and your body's response is to “adapt by laying down fat for insulation,” says Alan Hedge, Ph.D., a workplace design researcher at Cornell University. Fat storage for women kicks in at temps below about 76°F, and the average office thermostat is set at 72°F. So, yeah. Hedge estimates that this “heat gap” alone can add one or two pounds a year, even if you don't eat a single extra calorie.

**The Fix:** Sure, pencil skirts look great, but skinny jeans are true to their name: They'll not only keep you warm, but one study found that workers who wore casual clothes took 491 more steps and burned 25 more calories daily than those in business attire.

**#2. Your Windowless Cube.** Here's another reason to covet the view from the corner office: Research has uncovered a link between how much you weigh and how much exposure to natural light you get in a day, particularly in the morning. Laboring away in cubeland could lead to an extra 1.4 pounds, on average, compared with colleagues who soak up those crucial early rays. The theory is

that morning light keeps your body's hunger clock ticking along normally, while not getting enough of it can lead to increased appetite and insulin resistance (which can make you store rather than burn sugar).

**The Fix:** Take a longer route to the office, hold a standing meeting next to a windowed wall, pop out for a quick walk before noon—anything to work in at least 20 minutes of sun.

## YOUR STRESS LEVELS

**#1. Emotional Eating.** A quarter of U.S. employees cite their job as the top source of stress in their lives—and the toll it takes isn't just mental. When you're under pressure, your body releases hormones that can increase appetite, make you crave more sugary and fatty foods, and slow metabolism—a weight-gain trifecta. Even worse, you're probably not leaving those negative effects at the office: In an Ohio State University study, women who were served a fat-laden, 930-calorie meal 24 hours after a stressful day burned about 100 fewer calories than nonstressed women who ate the same meal.

**The Fix:** Program regular “detachment breaks,” which psychologists say can help you maintain your equilibrium and

## The Salary-Scale Connection

Overweight female employees are far less likely to break through the glass ceiling than their male peers. Forty-five to 61 percent of guys who've earned the title of CEO are overweight, versus just 5 to 22 percent of ladies. And for every 14 extra pounds a woman carries, she earns \$1,930 less per year than an average-weight colleague. These stats point to an unfortunate reality: Body size is yet another factor in the infuriating pay gap.