

Changing Food Habits When They Go Against the Grain

Some of our behaviors at work are shaped by cultural norms. Cultural norms are beliefs and practices generally accepted as valuable by a group of people. Cultural norms that have to do with how we treat each other and how we use shared space at work are positive and create a healthier work environment.



Some of our cultural norms at work don't always promote a healthier workplace. The norms that relate to coffee drinking, lunch practices, and food choices at meetings may not be healthy ones. However, there is subtle pressure to adopt these cultural norms or risk being shunned.

Can you think of a time a co-worker brought in a fruit basket to a meeting only to hear, "Where are the donuts?" or "Are you on some kind of health kick?" Or a co-worker's comment to you as you are heading out for a noon run being, "Gee, I wish I had time to take a lunch break." The strong message is one of, "That's not how we do things here."

In *Food to Work By*, you and your team members or buddy are looking for ways to increase your healthy eating habits. You certainly have control over your individual choices. However, changing the cultural food norms at your workplace may not be an easy nor popular task! Here are some suggestions for making this task a little easier.

Become more aware of your work group's cultural food norms

- For one week, observe the cultural norms in your work group as it relates to food choices and eating practices.
- Look for the subtle and not so subtle ways that these cultural norms are sustained.
- Notice how you adjust your choices to match those of your work group.

Introduce change into your cultural food norms

- For your next work meeting, bring in an alternative to donuts. (How about raisin bagel wedges with lowfat berry cream cheese?) See FWB **Educational Materials** for other ideas.
- Create a potluck sign-up sheet with a twist on the dessert category: Fruits or Fruit-based Desserts. See **Potluck or Potbelly** for more suggestions on potlucks.
- Talk to your co-worker who is in charge of the coffee fund, and start to include tasty, aromatic teas as an alternative to coffee.
- Start a habit of making Light Popcorn (lower saturated fat, lower sodium) to share in the afternoon as a deterrent to the mid-day Snickers run.

Solicit leadership support

- Suggest a talk by the Wellness Center staff on a nutrition or fitness topic. The Wellness Center web page offers an online request form for Health Promotion Outreach Presentations. www.wellness.lanl.gov/svc/outreach.htm
- If your supervisor is a role model for a healthy lifestyle, encourage her/him to verbally support employees taking care of their health.

Cultural food norms change slowly. Be persistent and be patient with your plan. Your co-workers will begin to notice your increased energy level and ask you what you are doing differently. You may eventually find you have some new recruits over to the side of healthy eating at work!