

# LAWYERS JOURNAL

L A W P R A C T I C E M A N A G E M E N T

## Workplace wellness: Make your office life healthier

By Natalia Autenrieth

Better choices can mean a happier, healthier office. Where is your greatest untapped opportunity for improving your health and well-being?

I would argue that for many people, the answer is “at work!” That may sound unconventional, as after all, we do not associate rows of cubicles and fluorescent lights with health. However, the choices we make at the office have a direct impact on health and well-being. We spend nearly 1,800 hours at work over the course of the year, so even our smallest choices can have a lasting impact.

Busy professionals have plenty on their minds, from the latest fire-drill deadline to managing relationships and juggling multiple responsibilities. Healthy habits are unlikely to stick if they are complicated or difficult to maintain. My recommendation is to choose one new healthy choice that would be easiest to try, then add another, spacing them out so that you are never overwhelmed. Here are some workplace wellness ideas to consider.

### Know your options.

Companies big and small are making an investment in the well-being of their employees. As a result, on-site gym facilities and healthy food choices aren't just for the likes of Google! Begin by learning more about the workplace wellness perks and benefits available through your employer: You might be surprised to find on-site chiropractic service, weight management support and discounts on fitness club memberships. Once you understand your options, use them – after all, they are a part of your overall compensation package.

### Resolve to move throughout the day.

Human bodies are not made to sit at a desk for eight hours at a time! By building more movement into your day, you will find a new source of productivity (and your back will thank you, too.) Your changes on this front need not be dramatic. Take the stairs, go for a walk at lunch or choose the bathroom that is farther away from your office.

### Drink water.

No, the water that is filtered through the coffee grounds does not count! Multiple studies have shown that 75% of Americans are chronically dehydrated. Are you one of them?

Here is a simple test: If you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated. As a result, you might find yourself foggy, more irritable, less able to concentrate, and more anxious, a terrible set of ingredients that can derail your workday. If drinking plain water sounds boring, invest in an infusion bottle and some fruit and herbs to make it more interesting. Health apps like FitBit and Hydro Coach can be effective, although non-tech solutions like crossing glasses of water off a checklist work too. Use whatever tools you like, and get that water in!

### Bring your own lunch and healthy snacks.

Oh, the dreaded Cubicle Diet: doughnuts from the morning meeting, pizza for lunch and candy from the vending machine to ward off the afternoon slump. If you are tired of the vicious cycle of office food, consider that bringing in your own lunch and snacks is the best way to control what goes into your body. Home-cooked lunch does not have to feel like a downgrade. Bring foods and healthy snacks for work that you genuinely enjoy, mix it up and enjoy the resulting savings and greater energy levels.

### Consider a standing desk.

If back pain plagues your days, sitting at a desk may not be for you. Early research has shown that standing desks can alleviate upper back and neck troubles. If you are skeptical of trying a standing desk, consider one of the convertible kits that allow you the flexibility of sitting or standing. Standing desks are a relatively recent introduction to the office, but studies are showing their potential at improving energy levels and productivity, along with weight loss and lower blood pressure.

### Keep your space clean.

How well do you know your office? Consider this survey from WebMD. The number one dirtiest place on the office is the handles on the faucet in the break room, followed by the door of the microwave. A study from the University of Arizona also found that an average desktop has more germs than a toilet seat.

Under normal circumstances, your immune system should be able to handle most of those threats without skipping a beat. However, stress and fatigue can sabotage your natural defense system. What can you do to protect yourself? As simple as it sounds, wash your hands. You might

also wipe down your desk and keyboard, dust the bookshelves, and put away old paperwork. This does not have to take long if you simply take five minutes at the end of the day to tidy up.

### **Take sanity breaks.**

Most professionals take sanity breaks throughout the day without having been instructed to do so. The problem is that those breaks aren't always effective. While a scroll through the Facebook or Instagram feed can feel like a welcome change of pace, it does not get you away from your monitor – so as far as your eyes and your body is concerned, you did not take a break at all!

Improve your workplace wellness by getting up from your desk, walking over to the water cooler to refill your bottle, or even doing a quick stretching routine. Those of us who need reminders about breaks might try the Pomodoro technique which is intense bursts of 25 minutes of focused work, followed by a short break.

### **Making your office life healthier, one choice at a time.**

Beyond bringing healthy snacks for work, overall healthier eating choices and walking breaks, it is important to be present to your stress levels. Take those vacation days, and make sure you really recharge on your days off. While it can be tempting to blame our busy schedules for the lack of focus on health, they are not an excuse. Even the busiest professionals can make small workplace wellness changes that will make their time at the office more productive, and their lives overall healthier and happier. ■

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*This article originally appeared on [jobs.acba.org/jobseeker/resources](https://jobs.acba.org/jobseeker/resources). Autenrieth has audited Fortune 500 clients as part of a Big 4 team, built an accounting department as a controller of a large hospital and served as a CPA consultant to municipalities. Today, she coaches high-achieving financial professionals and ghost-writes books and blogs on financial advice and technology.*