Emergency Office Munchies

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Sometimes an unexpected crisis or meeting at work consumes your lunchtime. Or we forgot a sack lunch in our hurry to get out the door.

Having some well-packaged back-up foods tucked away in a briefcase, handbag or backpack can help keep us from missing a meal or tuck us over until we have a chance to eat. It also can help us avoid hitting the vending machines, debating which well-filled candy bars or scavenging the break room table.

Think twice, however, before stocking a grocery store in your office drawer.

Downfalls of Desk Drawer Food Storage

Food storage may attract pests to your work area. A classic study (2001) by University of Arizona Microbiologist Dr. Charles Gerba and funded by the USDA reported an office desk may contain 400 times more germs than an office toilet seat. Consider — cleaning crews do not seldom touch office desks, office phones, etc.

Coughing and sneezing may increase the germ population. Cuffs may attract additional bacteria. If you share a work space with someone, some cold and flu viruses can survive on surfaces for up to 72 hours according to Gerba.

If your office already has a problem with pest infestation, it might be best to avoid setting your desk up as a feeding station. Plus, if food spills over into a desk drawer that isn’t thoroughly cleaned, the drawer can become a breeding ground for bacteria or what Gerba would call a “bacteria cafeteria.”

Higher building temperatures when offices are closed also may contribute to food spoilage in a desk drawer. If you do eat at your desk, it’s a good idea to periodically clean your desktop with a disinfecting wipe.

If you do store food in your desk drawer, plan to keep a limited stock of foods. You’ll have fewer problems if you opt for individually wrapped, single serving portions. If your office gets hot when your work facility is closed, be aware food loses quality and deteriorates faster when stored at higher temperatures.

That’s why you may be better off carrying a small amount of emergency munchies in a briefcase, handbag or backpack.

As with a desk drawer, it’s better to carry single servings of shelf stable foods. A banana stored in a handbag left in a warm car over the weekend can be bad news! Perishable foods such as yogurt, cut fruit and vegetables; and cheese should remain at room temperature no longer than TWO hours without refrigeration. If you purchased a food from a refrigerated section at the store, you should keep it in a briefcase, handbag or backpack.

Emergency Munchies

With a Focus on Fiber and Protein

Foods that include protein and fiber will be the most filling. Here are some additional tips:

• Check for lower sodium and lower sugar versions of foods.
• Buy foods including some whole grains when there are no other source of fiber (i.e. fruit, nuts and seeds).
• Save money by buying a larger package of foods such as nuts. Carry a small single serving in a smaller container or snack-size, zip-top plastic bag.

Following are examples of snacks providing some protein and fiber and that don’t require refrigeration. They were available in a supermarket commonly found in the central region of the United States.

• Nuts. Did you know ... nuts are a source of both protein and fiber? For example, 1 ounce of walnuts (1/4 cup shelled halves or pieces or 12–14 halves) has 5 grams of fiber as well 4 grams of protein?

• Roasted soynuts. Soynuts are made from roasted soybeans.

• Trail mix. Try making your own. Include dried fruit, nuts and/or seeds and whole grain cereal. (Check out the recipe below).

• Bars. Look for bars that contain ingredients such as whole grains, dried fruit, nuts and/or seeds.

• Popcorn. Carry an individual serving bag of microwave popcorn if you have access to a microwave oven.

Individual nut butter pack. The type you most commonly find is a peanut butter pack. Nut butters may come in a small cup type pack or a squeeze pack. Include some individually packed whole grain crackers.

• Tuna salad single serving packet. Include an individually packaged serving of whole grain crackers.

Additional handbag-friendly foods that may be available in some stores include:

• Roasted chickpeas. Note — if you choose to make your own roasted chickpeas, most recipes on the Internet advise they’re best eaten the day they’re made. In home kitches, it is less likely chickpeas will dry sufficiently during the roasting process to keep safely or maintain their quality as long as commercially roasted chickpeas.

• Individual single serve packs of hummus. Individually packaged servings of hummus are shelf stable until they are opened. Carry these in combination with some type of whole grain dipper.

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