

LUNCHTIME SURVEY

OCTOBER 2002



ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 564 working adults aged 18+ by telephone on 20-22nd September, 2002. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults.

AFTERNOON APATHY SYNDROME' AFFECTING 12 MILLION BRITISH WORKERS

Carbo-loaded diets lead to downturn in workplace efficiency-

When David Brent from TV's *The Office* is greeted by a sea of blank stares in afternoon meetings it might not be due to his inept management style - his employees could just be suffering from 'Afternoon Apathy Syndrome'.

New research out today shows that 12 million British workers (over 40% of the total UK workforce) are suffering from workplace lethargy being termed 'Afternoon Apathy Syndrome' or AAS by expert nutritionists.

The report, commissioned by Ryvita as part of its ongoing research into healthy eating, reveals that workers are regularly lunching on heavy, high-carbohydrate meals resulting in AAS. Nearly half choose to eat a starchy baked potato for lunch at least once a week and over a third opt for a weekly burger or another form of fast food. Pasta is also a popular choice with 18% eating it for lunch at least three times a week.

Nutritionist Fiona Hunter, who was involved in the research, comments: "Rather than using their lunch hours to recharge and re-energise, most Brits are eating stodgy meals leaving them lethargic in the afternoon."

"Many people think that they are boosting their energy levels by eating high carbohydrate lunches when in fact they are creating the opposite effect. Heavy, high carb meals increase levels of the chemical serotonin to the brain that in turn leads to drowsiness. What's more, large meals tie-up our energy levels in the digestion process as blood supply is directed to the stomach rather than the brain where energy signals are sent to the body."

The potential cost of this syndrome to British business is huge. If all the workers affected by AAS suffered a drop in their efficiency of just ten percent between 3pm and 4pm, it would cost the British economy £3.93 billion per year (based on the average UK wage).

AAS is significantly more prevalent with women than men. Contrary to social expectations that

women are more nutritionally savvy, just 35% of men report suffering from AAS compared to 52% of women. Many women actually skip the midday meal altogether with nearly a fifth missing lunch at least three times a week. Almost half choose to eat lunch at their desks while men are more likely to dine out at a café, pub or restaurant than women.

Nutritionist Fiona Hunter comments: "The fact that men are leaving their desks at lunchtime is helping them fight the effects of AAS. Fresh air and exercise, even if it is only a ten minute walk to the pub, can increase your heart and metabolic rate causing you to feel more alert. Workers can also help themselves to feel less drowsy by choosing to snack regularly throughout the day on foods that provide a healthy balance of carbohydrate and protein."

"AAS is clearly an issue that employers need to take seriously as this survey shows that it is affecting nearly half of their workforce. Providing a staff canteen with a selection of healthy meals and snacks is one way of combating the effects of the energy dip."

Fiona Hunter has compiled the following tips to help people avoid AAS:

1. Avoid heavy carbohydrate rich lunches – a high carb lunch increases the level of the neurotransmitter serotonin in the brain. Serotonin acts as a natural sedative making us feel sleepy
2. Drink a large glass of water before you start eating. It will help fill you stomach and reduce the risk of dehydrating and also prevent you from becoming dehydrated in the afternoon. Even mild dehydration is enough to make you feel tired and lethargic
3. Avoid alcohol – this can lead to dehydration
4. Make time to get up from your desk and if possible get a breath of fresh air – this will help to speed up you metabolic rate, making you feel more awake
5. A cup of coffee after lunch can help keep you alert particularly after a heavy lunch, but remember you shouldn't really be drinking more than six cups of coffee a day

Note to editors

- The survey was conducted by independent research company ICM in September 2002. 1,000 randomly selected adults were questioned
- Nutritionist Fiona Hunter has compiled a week's eating plan which can help to combat the effects of AAS

Q1. At which point during the day do you feel most lethargic?	
First thing	14%
Mid morning	6%
After lunch	19%
Mid afternoon	42%

Never	14%
Don't know	4%

Q2. On average, how many times per week (if ever) do you eat the following for lunch?

Sandwiches	3.52
Salad	2.14
A pasta dish	1.30
Soup	0.91
A baked potato	0.81
A burger/fast food	0.63
A pub lunch	0.47

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat sandwiches for lunch?

None	12%
1	10%
2	13%
3	11%
4	11%
5	25%
6	3%
7	13%
Don't know	*%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat a baked potato for lunch?

None	53%
1	26%
2	12%
3	4%
4	2%
5	1%
6	*%
7	1%
Don't know	*%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat a burger/fast food for lunch?

None	66%
1	20%
2	8%
3	3%

4	1%
5	2%
6	1%
7	1%
Don't know	*%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat soup for lunch?

None	52%
1	27%
2	12%
3	4%
4	2%
5	2%
6	*%
7	2%
Don't know	*%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat salad for lunch?

None	26%
1	21%
2	18%
3	14%
4	7%
5	5%
6	2%
7	7%
Don't know	*%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat a pasta dish for lunch?

None	41%
1	23%
2	18%
3	11%
4	3%
5	2%
6	*%
7	2%
Don't know	-%

Q3. On average how many times per average week (if ever) do you eat a pub lunch?

None	69%
1	23%
2	3%

3	2%
4	1%
5	1%
6	*%
7	1%
Don't know	1%

Q3. On average how often do you skip eating something for lunch for lunch?

Three times a week or more often	16%
Twice a week	15%
Once a week	15%
Once a fortnight	7%
Never - I always have lunch	47%

Q4. In which of the following places do you regularly eat lunch?

In the work canteen/dining area	47%
At your desk	45%
At home	41%
In a cafe	19%
In a pub	17%
In a restaurant	15%
On the street	10%
None of these places	5%
Don't know	*%