

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE OFFICE

BROWN BAGS AND BULLIES

10 Reasons to Never Eat Free Food

Most people's eyes light up if free food is mentioned at work. But using the fact that something is "free" as an excuse to eat junk food is nothing to be proud of. We get excited by the concept of free food, because at first glance it seems like a good deal. But cheap, mass-produced food isn't worth much in health, taste, or even satisfaction. Thus one of the most important lessons I've learned in my twelve years of higher education is:

JUST BECAUSE IT'S FREE DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO EAT IT.

Occasionally someone will offer you high-quality food at no cost, but these opportunities are few and far between. More often you will find yourself wading through a sea of doughnuts, pizza, cookies, and other junk food. Your best bet is skipping the empty calories altogether when attending meetings, seminars, and other public events. Here's why.

1. It's cheap

You might think that free food is a bargain, but if you think about what you're really getting, it won't seem like such a good deal. Cheap food means low-quality, mass-produced calories made by industrial processes. That's the stuff we want to avoid.

2. It's flavorless

The right combinations of sugar, fat, and salt pretty easily deceive your brain, as these ingredients strongly activate your neural reward pathways. But if you try to focus on the true flavor of food and eat mindfully, you'll learn to taste the difference between real food and the flavorless industrial stuff.

3. It's bad for you

Processed foods are responsible for almost all "diseases of civilization," including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. When you wolf down a few of those brownie bites at happy hour, you are directly

contributing to your likelihood of developing these chronic diseases. Is that value?

4. You aren't saving money

You may tell yourself that this free meal will keep you from eating later, but there's a good chance you will eat again anyway. Processed foods do not satisfy you, but actually stimulate your appetite and strengthen future cravings. Also, if you factor in your future health-care costs, what you save by eating that \$2 slice of free pizza starts to seem rather trivial.

5. You'll feel gross later

Junk food makes you feel bad, both physically and mentally. If someone offered you a free headache, would you take it?

6. It screws up your metabolism

Highly refined foods can induce insulin resistance over the next few hours, making both this and your next meal more fattening. If you make a habit of eating cheap abundant food, this condition can become chronic and develop into type 2 diabetes. What a bargain!

7. You'll gain weight

With insulin resistance comes weight gain, and with time you will gain more weight eating fewer calories. Unfortunately, people aren't often giving away free plus-size jeans.

8. You're eating empty calories

When you submit to eating cheap food, you are also choosing *not* to eat nutritious food. Choosing a diet rich in vitamins and other essential nutrients is necessary for reducing risk for sickness and disease, not to mention cravings. Foods typically offered as free don't even fulfill our most basic nutritional (or emotional) needs.

9. You don't need it

Chances are you get plenty of calories in your typical day. So why do you feel you need to eat junk food just because it is free?

10. It isn't worth it

The truth is free junk food isn't really free. Even if processed foods don't cost you money, they still cost you your health, happiness, and sense of well-being. As a foodist, you can do better.

Healthy Snack Ideas

Here are some snack ideas to get you started, but don't feel limited by this list. Start with foods you enjoy and work from there.

apples	charcuterie	boiled eggs
pears	sardines	sparkling water
melon	string cheese	tea
grapefruit	fancy cheese	tisane (herbal tea)
oranges	kale chips	dark chocolate
pistachios	carrots	dried fruit
almonds	avocado	mint tea
cashews	celery	juice spritzer
trail mix	bell pepper	bean salad
nut butter on fruit/ veggie	zucchini	peanuts
smoked salmon	hummus	yogurt
jerky	edamame	
	lentils	

Flight-Friendly Food

Mexican-Style Quinoa Salad

SERVES 2 TO 3

- 1 cup dry quinoa**
- ½ cup chopped red pepper**
- 1 green onion or shallot, chopped**
- ½ cup grape tomatoes, halved**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Half bag of arugula or baby spinach**
- Salt and cayenne pepper**
- 1 lime**
- Tapatio or favorite Mexican hot sauce**

Rinse and cook the quinoa in excess water until tender, 10 to 15 minutes. While the quinoa is cooking, cut up the pepper, onion, and tomatoes, mince the garlic, and chop up the cilantro, stems and all. If you are using a green onion, save some for garnish.

When the quinoa is finished cooking, drain and set it aside. Heat a frying pan on medium-high heat and add the olive oil. Add the onions and red peppers and cook until caramelized, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Turn off the heat and add the quinoa, stirring to mix. Fold in the arugula or spinach and season with salt and cayenne pepper to taste.

Transfer the quinoa mixture to a large serving bowl and add the tomatoes and cilantro. Squeeze in the juice of half a lime, add a few dashes of Tapatio or other hot sauce to taste, and stir. Adjust salt and spices. Garnish with green onion slices, extra cilantro leaves, and a wedge of lime. Store leftovers in disposable containers in the fridge.