

A WORKPLACE NUTRITION DIETITIAN



Elaine Anderson RD
Workplace Health
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I have been a dietitian for over 10 years and have been lucky enough to work in many areas of dietetics, including gaining experience in gastroenterology and nutrition support in the acute setting with my first job. I was then lucky to obtain a job specialising in stroke rehab, an area I am passionate about and something that can be influenced by diet and lifestyle.

One of my specialisms is in palliative care in the hospice setting. As per recent headlines, our diet and lifestyle can increase the risk of developing certain diseases and some cancers may be preventable by eating a better diet and getting enough exercise.¹ This is one of the main reasons I have developed a passion for workplace health, as it's where I feel there is a huge opportunity to achieve small changes, which can influence the occurrence of disease. Over the past year, I have developed my own company Care 4 Nutrition and I have recently gained accreditation from the BDA Work Ready Programme, which has helped me develop in this area.

I normally have two types of freelance day: home office and out of the office.

HOME OFFICE DAY

I rise at 7.30am and have a good breakfast to get my day off to a good start. As a workplace health dietitian, I know all too much about the importance of starting the day with a balanced breakfast containing some carbohydrate, protein and one of my five a day. Most days for me that's porridge with milk topped with fresh fruit.

I then catch up with emails from clients. This could be around planning a session for a specific company, or getting more information for a workplace nutrition assessment. Preparation is key when planning any intervention,

as this can help tailor to the needs of the company. For example, I was recently asked to focus on food and mood due to management seeing an increase in absence as a result of mental health concerns. I may also spend time analysing results from assessments I have done, or work on a report.

I sometimes make time for a quick gym class, which can help me stay refreshed in my working day. Exercise is proven to help increase concentration levels and leave you feeling revitalised. I definitely feel the benefits of doing this during the working day and when I am working in my other roles, I try to get out for a brisk walk at lunchtime (and encourage my colleagues to do the same). I have a quick shower and tuck into an easy lunch. Evidence suggests that those who skip lunch are more likely to be less productive in the working day.² I love to have various salads, ensuring that there is also some protein like chicken breast and some carbohydrate such as wholegrain bread.

I then spend some time on social media, including Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. I find these are very useful for networking and marketing my services. I will also check to see what has been in the media regarding food and nutrition and I may post on social media about anything relevant. I make time to share content from fellow registered dietitians. It's important to me that I am helping to share and spread evidence-based advice.

Elaine is working as a part-time freelance dietitian. She is the founder of Care 4 Nutrition (www.care4nutrition.co.uk/), which specialises in workplace health. This is alongside her NHS and charity roles.



REFERENCES
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I will then spend more time planning sessions, ensuring I have researched the company I am working for and the types of employees they have. I normally prepare resources such as handouts or tailored information in advance. I always make some time at least once a week for continuing professional development, whether it be watching a webinar or reading a new journal around the evidence for workplace nutrition and health interventions.

OUT OF OFFICE DAY

My morning mainly consists of final preparation for a workshop I am running, or groundwork for one-to-one sessions with employees. This may be gathering resources such as dietary information sheets. I will also make sure my workshop is timed to perfection, as I don't want to over run in a busy corporate environment. If I am running a food demonstration, I also prepare for this in the morning, so the food is fresh. The types of clients I see may be in healthcare, logistics, the beauty industry, construction or public relations, to name but a few.

I will then travel to provide the intervention and sometimes stay behind afterwards to provide information for staff if there are any particular questions. I will always take time to have some lunch if I am out for the day and ensure I drink

plenty of water. Dehydration has been found to have an impact on brain structures, similar to mild cognitive impairment.³

Another day may consist of touring a worksite from a small office to a large site, including identifying potential barriers to healthy eating. This may also comprise of touring a catering facility, or chatting with staff on an individual level. I will meet with relevant individuals including, for example, the HR manager who will help with tailoring a nutritional needs assessment.

If there is any time at the end of the day, I will begin to evaluate my intervention, or start writing my report. Evaluation is key to any workplace nutrition intervention.⁴ This shows if something has worked, has been useful and can also show a return on investment. In the current economic climate, big budgets for workplace health are being slashed, so companies need to see that they are investing in something worthwhile.

I feel privileged to be able to share the knowledge of how diet and lifestyle choices can influence how we work, feel and behave, but, most importantly, how it impacts on our long-term health. I hope that working outside of the healthcare setting will help increase awareness of the importance of prevention, whilst helping companies develop a happier, healthier and more productive workforce.