
Real-World Strategies for Dealing with Office Treats

A couple of weeks ago a co-worker sent this email to everyone in the office: "There are three types of pie and a can of whipped cream in the fridge! Pumpkin, Apple, and Pecan, please help me get rid of them!!"

This is what's being called: food dumping. Like most people, I've been guilty of food dumping, but also and I've also been the victim.

Food dumping is when you bring party leftovers, unwanted food gifts or just extra treats into the office break room. Sometimes it's not really unwelcome food but a special treat for your co-workers or a neighboring office as a holiday gift. No matter why it's there, it seems most office break rooms are filled with food this time of year.

First off I guess I need to congratulate my co-worker and all "food dumpers" for realizing that they really don't want all that extra food sitting around their house. But this doesn't encourage or help your coworkers to eat more healthful.

OK, I don't want to be a real humbug about this and say that no one should have special holiday goodies. Being realistic, I know it's going to happen. What can you do if you really are trying to be healthful?

Here are a couple thoughts to help you take control of the situation:

- Encourage a "no dumping" policy at the office. If people do want to share special recipes or treat, perhaps set up a schedule or calendar of when each person or office is welcomed to bring something. This may eliminate the overflowing trays and possibly waste.
- **OUT OF SIGHT-OUT OF MIND.** If they MUST bring candies and cookies, ask that they be hidden or at least covered.
- If the snacks and goodies sitting around the break room are just too tempting for you, one solution is to try to avoid that room altogether.
- If you're co-workers aren't on board, at least you can control your office and your desk. Have healthy snacks in your desk so you won't be starved and tempted when you see a large plate of treats hanging out by the copier.
- Start your day off right with a healthy breakfast so you won't be as tempted as you might be when you head for the second cup of coffee. Keep the breakfast light and healthy so if you do want to snack there will be a place for it in your healthy diet.
- Keep a pair of exercise shoes in the office to take walking breaks.

One more thing, I couldn't let the idea of food sitting around go without mentioning some **food safety issues**:

- Perishable foods should be kept at room temperature for no more than two hours. If it's out longer than that the food should be pitched.
- Label foods with ingredients—especially nuts and gluten—for those with allergies and intolerances.
- Label foods with dates, too. This will eliminate “mystery foods” in a couple of days. Most perishable items should be pitched after four days.

There may be other options instead of food dumping. Could you share food gifts with charitable institutions, nursing homes or women's shelters that may not have any treats? Unfortunately, due to food safety issues, many may not be able to accept homemade or opened food items. Think about what foods would freeze well for later when they would be more appreciated and enjoyed.

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