

# Why we need to stop eating on the run



by **Fiona Kane**  
Nutritionist

Once upon a time, families had a ritual of sitting down and eating dinner together discussing the day. Office workers would have an hour for lunch

and go out to an eatery, the park or lunch room. Now many of us eat on the run, in front of the TV, in the car or at a computer while we continue to work. This change has not been good for our physical or emotional health. I have noticed recently when reading studies that a lack of meaningful connection to others can be a major contributing factor to mental health issues, including addiction.

Another issue is stress, I have noticed that many people are feeling stressed and overwhelmed about their work and life in general - busy-ness has become the new "normal". This stress and/or busy-ness often keep our body in fight or flight mode instead of the mode it should be in most of the time which is rest and digest.

Fight or flight is an ancient coping mechanism our bodies use. It's an evolutionary strategy to cope with immediate dangers, such as an approaching lion! In response to an external threat, stress hormones are released from your adrenal glands to enable you to either stand and fight or flee. In modern times, the feeling of being under constant stress and busy-ness, whether from work, family or financial pressures is interpreted by your body in the same way and can therefore lead you to be in a permanent state of "emergency". Being in a state of "emergency" long term leads to many health issues including anxiety and heart disease.

Our busy-ness and stress also means that many of us see eating and preparing food as being a hassle and unimportant, we therefore go for the easy fix of fast food and instant meals. Eating this type of "food" most of the time puts your body under stress causing inflammation, driving health issues and leading to nutritional deficiencies. Being deficient in important nutrients such as essential fatty acids, amino acids, zinc, magnesium, vitamin C and B will lead to more symptoms and health issues such as stress, fatigue, mood and anxiety issues, sleep issues and much more over time.



Looking at the populations around the world who live the longest and happiest lives there is some things that they all have in common:

- 1 They eat real food that is locally grown and prepared at home (no fast food or instant meals).
- 2 They take time to prepare and eat meals as they understand that what they eat and how they eat it, is important.
- 3 They have connection - they connect with each other whilst preparing and eating meals. It is seen as an important social ritual where they talk and laugh and learn.

It is time that we understand that meal times are vitally important for health, a time to slow down, relax and enjoy preparing home cooked meals, followed by sitting to eat and connecting with family and friends. Our meal times are important for nourishment to the mind and body.

Here's why we need to bring back the ritual of sitting down to eat:

1. Your body needs the ritual of sitting down calmly to eat to allow you to relax and help digestion and absorption of important nutrients. We need to be in what is called "rest and digest" mode for this to happen. Notice that rest and digest go together! If you want to digest well, you need to rest. Eating on the run is a big contributor to digestive issues such as heartburn and reflux.
2. Resting to eat allows you to eat consciously, to be aware of your body, listening to its important messages/signals to know when you are satisfied as opposed to full. These signals take time to occur, if you "inhale" your meal within five minutes your body hasn't had time to send any signals!
3. You are more likely to make better choices when you eat consciously, you will choose foods that nourish your body giving you sustained energy to get through the day.
4. Resting to eat allows you a moment to slow down/recharge/have a mental and physical break from your work. This may even increase your productivity.
5. Meal times and meal preparation create a wonderful opportunity to connect with family/friends (connecting with others is important for our physical and mental health). This is where you have time to find out about everyone's day, their wins and challenges, a place to offer advice and support, having important family discussions and opportunities to learn. It is an important place for children to learn how to socialise and have adult conversation.

Let's start having nourishing meal time rituals again!

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