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Candy offload
Thinking of bringing leftover cookies to the office? Don't.



What seems like a nice gesture to fellow co-workers is an ambush for those mazed out on sweet thrills from the holidays

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You've gorged on gingerbread. You've stuffed yourself with pie. Now, with the holiday feasts behind you, it should be easy to get back to a healthy diet, right?

Not so fast. Your co-workers may sabotage your nutrition plans yet.

'Tis the season for employees to bring in leftover holiday treats – unwanted boxes of chocolates, unfinished tins of fudge and containers of excess butter tarts – to share around the workplace. Yet what might seem like a nice gesture at first quickly turns into overkill. And for those already suffering from an overdose of sweets, the continued onslaught is nothing short of a nightmare.

Karen Brar, who works at a non-profit organization in Surrey, B.C., went from loving all the goodies that arrived around her office before Christmas to loathing them within days.

"After a little while, you're eating the chocolate for the sake of eating it ... and it loses its lustre. By the end of it, it's just like, ugh," she says, adding that she now admonishes her workmates for trying to pawn off more treats when she's gearing up to start eating for the New Year. "I get mad at them. It's like 'What are you doing? Are we not friends?'"

Invariably, she said, they make excuses. "They say, 'Lady, someone gave these to me. I can't eat them all myself.'"

Jacqueline MacKinnon, an addictions counsellor in Kamloops, B.C., knows all too well the sweaty, irritable, bloated-yet-empty feeling that goes with eating too much holiday candy. Ambushed annually with sweets, she separates the bounty offloaded at her office into two categories.

"There are the chocolates and snacks that you bring in because you want to be nice to your co-workers," she says.

"And then there are the chocolates and the snacks you bring in because you're either sick of them or you don't like them and you want to look like you're being nice to your co-workers."

Ms. MacKinnon acknowledges she's done both – and learned a few tricks along the way.

People are more likely to devour unwanted goodies if you set them out before the morning coffee break, she says. It also increases the chances of people coming back for more at lunch and for a mid-afternoon snack.

It also helps to leave items with the lid off the container to provide easy access, she adds. Moreover, she's noticed that treats that are individually wrapped tend to disappear more quickly since people can be assured they haven't been handled by everyone else. (Nobody likes a grubby-looking communal bowl of jellybeans.) Lastly, she advises, think, "location, location, location." Place treats next to the reception desk, near the water cooler and at other high-traffic spots so people can make a quick – and even unconscious – grab as they pass by.

But for all her tips about how to get rid of goodies, Ms. MacKinnon says she is of no help at all when it comes to strategies for resisting temptation.

"Avoid the office," she jokes.

Unloading your superfluous sweets onto others is one of the best things you can do for your own health and the health of your family, says registered dietician Gloria Tsang, a Vancouver member of the Dietitians of Canada and founder of the nutrition website www.HealthCastle.com. (She herself intends to pawn off chocolates she received for Christmas to get them out of the house.)

But obviously it's all for naught if you simply give in to other people's rejects. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to keep your own consumption in check, Ms. Tsang says.

When it comes to workplace eating habits, office employees generally don't graze at their desks all day, she notes. Rather, they're more inclined to overeat or snack on junk food during breaks.

Thus, it's best not to let yourself get extremely hungry, she advises, otherwise you might make irrational food choices. Always keep a healthy snack, like fruit or a granola bar, handy to avoid getting to that point.

Ms. Tsang also suggests keeping busy at breaks by going outside for a walk to remove yourself from temptation altogether.

Another trick she uses is to chew gum. "If my mouth is busy, I don't have space to eat anything."

If you simply can't resist the buffet of leftovers, then the least you can do is be strategic about what you eat, Ms. Tsang says. A single piece or two of high-quality chocolate will generally be enough to satisfy you, whereas chocolate candy, the lower-grade variety, will just keep you hankering for more.

"If it's something good, if it's something decadent, it doesn't really hurt to go ahead and have a piece. But definitely pick the good ones over the bad."

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