Solve your problem with a wink

I Eat Lunch at My Desk, and Even My Fork Is in a Meeting

How to Make Regular Meals Work with an Unpredictable Schedule



Max Paradox

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PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

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INTRO

There comes a moment during the day when you suddenly realize that you haven't eaten anything substantial since morning. Not because you've forgotten that food exists. Quite the opposite. You've thought about it several times. At eight in the morning, you planned to have a peaceful breakfast. At ten, you promised yourself you'd take a break in a minute. At noon, you checked the clock and decided you'd have lunch once you'd finished an urgent task. At one, another assignment appeared, and at two, someone suggested a quick conversation that somehow lasted forty minutes. Eventually, you find yourself sitting in front of your computer, moving documents with one hand and trying to open a food container with the other. Your fork is lying beside the keyboard, apparently waiting for an invitation to join the meeting as well.

The most absurd part is that nobody actually planned such a day. Nobody wakes up in the morning thinking, "Today, I'll have my first proper meal whenever my responsibilities decide I've earned it." Usually, the plan is perfectly reasonable. There will be breakfast, then lunch, perhaps something light in between. The trouble is that this plan assumes the existence of something that can sometimes feel like a luxury: predictable time. And predictable time can disappear faster than an empty calendar slot after someone sends the message, "Could we move the meeting by fifteen minutes?"

If your day is filled with changes, phone calls, responsibilities, commuting, unexpected requests, and tasks that always turn out to be more urgent than the ones before

them, eating regularly can feel like organizing a small logistical operation. You need to find the right moment, have something prepared, remember to take a break, and ideally manage to eat without answering messages at the same time. It all sounds simple until life starts following its own schedule.

And the problem isn't limited to lunch. When meals happen at random, the entire day can become less comfortable. Hunger builds up, concentrating on tasks becomes harder, and you're more likely to make impulsive decisions about what to eat. Sometimes breakfast is small, the next meal gets postponed, and by evening you try to make up for everything you missed earlier. On other days, you spend half the day running on coffee and the conviction that you'll finally sit down once you've finished just one more thing. That one thing, however, seems to have an extraordinary ability to reproduce.

This doesn't mean that every irregular meal is a disaster. Life doesn't have to resemble a spreadsheet containing perfectly distributed meals, and one day without a textbook schedule doesn't undo your healthy habits. The trouble begins when an exception becomes your everyday system, even though you never consciously chose it. If eating regularly depends entirely on everything going according to plan, it's difficult to expect regularity. One unexpected phone call, a delay, an additional task, or a change of plans is enough to bring the whole arrangement crashing down.

Many people try to solve this problem through willpower. They decide that starting Monday, they'll eat at fixed times. They prepare an ambitious schedule, write down the hours, and sometimes even buy groceries for several days in advance. For a while, everything looks promising. Then an

ordinary but slightly more demanding day arrives, and it becomes clear that the schedule never accounted for reality. Breakfast gets pushed back by an hour, the planned lunch clashes with other responsibilities, and the meal prepared in advance remains in the refrigerator as a witness to good intentions. Disappointment follows, along with the familiar thought that once again, you've lacked consistency.

But the problem often lies somewhere else. A rigid plan requires the day to adapt to it. A flexible system, on the other hand, allows you to maintain some order even when circumstances change. That's an important distinction. You can't always decide when a meeting will end, how long your commute will take, whether someone will ask for urgent help, or whether family responsibilities will disrupt your afternoon plans. But you can have some influence over how you prepare for these situations and what you do when your original plan is no longer realistic.

That's the central idea behind this book: regular meals don't have to mean eating at exactly the same time every day. This isn't about creating another system that holds you accountable for every minute. It's about organizing your meals so that eating isn't the first thing you sacrifice whenever the day gets busy. You can have a basic structure while still leaving room for changes. You can plan ahead without pretending that the future has signed a binding agreement to cooperate.

This calls for a slightly different way of thinking. Instead of asking only, "What time will I have lunch?", it's worth asking, "How will I make sure I eat if I can't have lunch at that time?" Rather than planning every day from beginning to end, it's better to recognize its typical limitations. Some days are predictable, others have an irregular pace, and some

resemble a sequence of events connected by just one fact: they all happen on the same day. Each of these situations may require a slightly different approach.

In practice, this also means looking more closely at what makes eating difficult. Sometimes the problem isn't a lack of time but a lack of preparation. On other occasions, food is available, but there simply aren't the conditions to eat it peacefully. Sometimes you postpone your break for so long that eventually you grab whatever is available, as long as it can satisfy your hunger quickly. Financial limitations, restricted access to a kitchen, unpredictable responsibilities, or the need to adapt to other people's schedules can also get in the way. Not all these problems can be solved with one clever trick. Some require changes in organization, others call for a sensible compromise, and some involve accepting that under certain circumstances, a perfect solution simply isn't possible.

We're also not going to pretend that everyone wants to spend Sunday afternoon preparing twenty containers of food for the entire week. If you enjoy doing that, excellent. If the very thought makes you picture yourself standing at the kitchen counter with the expression of someone serving a sentence for a crime they never committed, there are other possibilities. Good meal organization should take your resources, skills, preferences, and actual available time into account. It doesn't need to look impressive in a photograph. It needs to work on an ordinary Tuesday when you have absolutely no desire to take on an extra project called "Managing My Own Lunch."

In the chapters ahead, we'll look at how to recognize your daily rhythm, prepare for changes, reduce decisions made under the influence of hunger, and find solutions that don't

require you to supervise yourself constantly. There will be room for planning, but also for improvisation. We'll consider simple meals, practical food supplies, sensible use of available options, and ways to organize breaks in conditions that are far from ideal. We'll also look at how to return to your usual rhythm after a day when everything went differently from what you'd expected.

You don't need a perfect calendar, a kitchen that resembles a cooking studio, or iron discipline. You need a system that can survive contact with your actual life. One in which a meal isn't a reward for finishing all your responsibilities, because those responsibilities may never actually end. One in which you don't have to start from scratch every time a meeting changes its time or an unexpected task appears.

You may still occasionally eat lunch at your desk. Not every situation can be transformed into a peaceful break with a garden view and a beautifully arranged table. But there's a difference between consciously choosing that solution and finding yourself squeezing food between two tasks as though it has to ask permission to be there. That's the difference we're trying to reclaim.

And the fork? It's time it stopped attending meetings nobody invited it to. It has far more important responsibilities.

Chapter 1 - Your Day Doesn't Have a Fixed Lunch Hour. And That's Exactly What You Need to Understand

The problem with eating regularly often becomes noticeable when it starts interfering with something completely different. You find it difficult to concentrate on a task because your thoughts keep drifting back to food. You become irritable, even though just an hour earlier you were convinced that everything was under control. In the afternoon, you suddenly crave something, anything, that you can eat quickly without having to step away from your responsibilities. Then, in the evening, when you finally get to sit down, you discover that your appetite has its own plans and has no intention of limiting itself to a modest dinner.

In this situation, it's easy to reach a straightforward conclusion: you need to keep a closer eye on your meal times. The trouble is that this is a little like trying to repair a clock when the real problem is that someone keeps moving its hands. You can schedule lunch for 1 p.m., but if that time regularly gets taken up by conversations, tasks, journeys, or other responsibilities, making a declaration won't change much. An hour written in your calendar doesn't automatically create time to eat. It can, however, create another source of frustration when you fail to stick to it for the fifth time.

Before you start organizing your meals, it's worth looking at what your day actually looks like. Not what it should look like according to an ideal plan, but what you really experience. This distinction matters because many unsuccessful attempts come from planning for an imaginary

version of yourself. That version wakes up refreshed, enjoys a peaceful morning, always remembers to prepare food, and never receives an urgent message just as they're about to leave their desk. The real version sometimes has five minutes between one responsibility and another, and their refrigerator doesn't always know what the next three days have in store.

Observe First, Organize Later

For a few ordinary days, pay attention to when you actually eat. Don't try to improve your behavior immediately. Don't change your meal times, introduce restrictions, or judge every deviation from your intentions. What you need is information, not another project that ends with a sense of guilt. Simply make a note of the approximate times of your meals, the circumstances preceding them, and the reasons why eating was postponed or skipped.

You don't need to keep a detailed food diary containing an exact description of every portion. At this stage, context matters more than precision. For example, you might write: breakfast before leaving home, lunch postponed because of a meeting, snack in the car, late dinner. If a meal didn't happen, note why. Was there not enough time? Had you failed to prepare anything? Didn't you want to interrupt your work? Or did you have an opportunity to eat, but no suitable moment appeared because every available ten minutes immediately filled up with something else?

After a few days, recurring patterns may begin to emerge. Perhaps breakfast is fairly consistent, but lunch practically doesn't exist at the hours you've assigned to it. Maybe Mondays and Tuesdays are packed with meetings, while the other days look completely different. You might also discover that you eat regularly until noon, after which a

series of responsibilities begins pushing subsequent meals further and further back. Some people notice that their biggest problem isn't eating itself, but the transition between work and other responsibilities. They finish one task, move straight to another, and never have a clearly defined moment when they can stop.

It's useful to distinguish between three situations. The first is a lack of available time: you genuinely cannot stop and eat properly at that moment. The second is a lack of preparation: time is available, but you don't have anything suitable within reach, or getting a meal requires too much effort. The third is the absence of a clear decision: you could take a break, but you keep postponing it because the task in front of you seems more important. These situations may look similar from the outside, but they require different solutions. If the problem is that you have no food available, simply reminding yourself to take a break won't achieve much. If you have food but cannot bring yourself to stop working, doing another grocery shop won't solve the whole problem either.

Pay attention to how you experience hunger throughout the day. This isn't about judging whether you eat too much or too little. It's about noticing when a clear need for food appears and what you do in response. Some people ignore the first signals because they're busy. Others only realize they're hungry when the feeling has already become very uncomfortable. Sometimes appetite is barely noticeable during intense work and returns only after the work is finished. This is valuable information when planning meals because not every day provides equally easy-to-recognize signals.

Also notice the situations in which you eat faster than you intended or choose whatever food happens to be available. Does this happen after a long gap between meals? When you haven't prepared anything in advance? Or on days when you have no idea what time you'll finish your responsibilities? Don't immediately assume that the cause is a lack of self-control. Sometimes a rushed decision is simply the consequence of an earlier part of the day leaving you with no convenient options.

Not Every Day Is the Same

One of the most common planning mistakes is treating the entire week as one repeating structure. In reality, Monday may look completely different from Wednesday. On one day, you start work early and have long blocks of tasks. On another, you're moving between different locations. On yet another, most of your responsibilities depend on decisions made by other people. If you try to impose an identical meal schedule on all these days, you'll quickly discover that your calendar has no obligation to respect your assumptions.

Instead, divide your days into a few practical types. You don't need a complicated classification system. It's enough to recognize which days are relatively predictable, which have variable hours, and which are particularly demanding because they involve travelling or responding to other people's needs. You may discover that two or three characteristic patterns repeat throughout most weeks.

For example, on a quieter day, you may be able to have lunch at home or at work at roughly the same time. On a day full of meetings, you need greater flexibility because breaks may appear irregularly. On a day involving travel, the main consideration is whether food will be available along the way and whether you can take something with you. You don't

need to solve all these situations yet. First, identify which ones actually occur in your life.

A useful approach is to look at the calendar from the previous week. Not to reconstruct every minute, but to identify the periods when meals most frequently lose out to other responsibilities. If you have unpredictable meetings every day between noon and 2 p.m., scheduling lunch for exactly 1 p.m. may not be particularly sensible. If, however, you usually finish one block of tasks around 11:30 a.m. and don't start the next one until 1 p.m., perhaps you've found a realistic opportunity to eat.

Remember that an empty space in your calendar doesn't necessarily mean free time. Ten minutes between meetings may be enough for a short break, but not necessarily for preparing and eating a proper lunch. Conversely, an hour without scheduled events may actually be time you've already allocated to commuting, shopping, or completing tasks that never made it into your calendar. That's why you should observe not only formal commitments but also the activities that regularly occupy your day.

It's particularly useful to identify what we might call fixed points. These are events that occur at roughly the same time and are usually difficult to move. They might include your starting time at work, picking someone up, regular family responsibilities, or recurring meetings. You can organize meals around these fixed points instead of trying to squeeze them into identical hours every day. If you know that you usually have an opportunity to take a break after a particular responsibility, you can use that event as a reference point.

Hunger Isn't the Only Information That Matters

When organizing meals, it's easy to focus exclusively on the time and the sensation of hunger. But the conditions in which you can eat are equally important. A break at home looks different from a break at work, and both differ from eating while travelling between locations. Access to a refrigerator, the ability to heat food, somewhere comfortable to sit, or the time needed to buy a meal can determine whether a particular idea is realistic.

Imagine that you plan to bring homemade lunch with you. It sounds sensible until you discover that the place where you spend most of your day has neither a refrigerator nor a way to heat your food. The idea itself isn't bad, but it doesn't fit the conditions. You could certainly try to overcome every obstacle, but it makes more sense to account for it during the planning stage. Otherwise, you'll regularly prepare something that you later have no practical way to use.

So check what options are available in the places where you spend most of your time. Can you store food there? Do you have access to drinking water? Is there somewhere you can sit down? How long does it take to get a meal if you don't bring one with you? Are there reasonable options nearby, or is your only possibility an impulsive purchase made in a hurry? The goal isn't to turn every location into a perfect dining room. You simply need to know what you can rely on.

It's equally important to recognize your own limitations. If you don't have time to cook in the morning, don't assume you'll prepare an elaborate meal every day before leaving home. If you're exhausted in the evening, a plan based on spending hours preparing food may not survive even the first week. If your responsibilities change from one day to

the next, you need a solution that doesn't require you to know your entire schedule in advance.

This kind of assessment isn't an excuse for chaos. It's an honest evaluation of the conditions in which your new system will have to operate. Otherwise, you may create a plan that looks beautiful on paper and is completely useless in practice. Paper is patient. Life isn't always.

Build a Picture of Your Actual Day

After observing your routine for a few days, try answering several specific questions. When are you most likely to manage a peaceful meal? At what moments do you most often postpone eating? Which responsibilities interfere with your plans most frequently? Is the problem a lack of time, a lack of preparation, or difficulty interrupting your work? What places and facilities are available to you? Do the different days of the week vary enough to require different solutions?

You don't have to answer everything perfectly. It's enough to start recognizing recurring patterns. Write down the three most common obstacles and identify the situations in which they occur. For example, you might discover that:

- You most often postpone lunch on days with a large number of meetings.
- When you're away from home, you haven't prepared anything to eat.
- If you don't take a break before noon, finding an opportunity later becomes difficult.

This short list is more useful than a general resolution to start eating regularly from now on. It shows you where to look for solutions. Perhaps you need to improve your meal preparation, or perhaps you need to change the way you

schedule breaks. It's also possible that some of the problem comes from external conditions over which you have very little control. That's worth knowing too, rather than blaming yourself for every change in your schedule.

At this stage, don't try to fix the entire week. It's enough to stop treating irregular eating as one large, vaguely defined organizational flaw. Break the problem down into specific situations. The more accurately you recognize them, the easier it will be to choose solutions that actually fit your life.

You may also discover that some days don't require much change at all. If you already eat reasonably regularly on those days, there's no reason to rebuild everything just for the sake of it. Keep the elements that work well. The goal isn't to create an entirely new life, but to organize the parts of your existing one in which eating regularly keeps losing out to other things.

There's another benefit to this kind of observation: it helps you distinguish between what is genuinely difficult and what merely seems difficult because you've been following a particular pattern for so long. Sometimes all it takes is noticing that there's a recurring gap between two responsibilities that you haven't previously considered a possible time for a meal. On other occasions, you'll realize that you have no reasonable break for several hours and need a different way to prepare your food. Both conclusions are valuable, even though they lead to different decisions.

Regularity begins with understanding your own rhythm. Only when you stop planning for an ideal day can you start organizing meals for the real one. And as you've probably already noticed, the real one doesn't always ask for your permission before changing its plans.

Chapter 2 - Why Lunch Always Loses to Urgent Matters

12:15 p.m. You know it's time to eat something. You've even prepared a meal. All you need to do is get up, put your phone down, and take a break. That's precisely when a message arrives: someone needs a quick answer. You reply. Then somebody calls with an additional question. Next, you remember an issue you were supposed to resolve before the end of the day. When you look at the clock again, it's 1:20 p.m. Lunch is still waiting, but now you have even less time because another meeting is about to begin.

Does this sound familiar? Perhaps you've stopped noticing how many times a day you postpone your own needs. You don't do it after some elaborate philosophical debate. Something else simply seems more urgent at that particular moment. Replying to a message will only take a minute. The phone call will be short. The task needs to be finished before the next one appears. Each of these decisions seems reasonable on its own. The problem arises when they combine into one recurring mechanism: eating is always the thing that can be postponed.

This isn't just a matter of time management. Several overlapping factors influence how regularly you eat. The pace of work, the expectations of people around you, the availability of food, the way you make decisions, and even your beliefs about when you're allowed to take a break all play a part. Until you recognize these mechanisms, you can keep introducing increasingly detailed schedules that will continue losing to exactly the same obstacles.

The Urgency Trap

In everyday life, many responsibilities compete for your attention. Some are genuinely urgent, while others merely look urgent because somebody expects a quick response. Still others become important simply because they've appeared at an inconvenient moment. When everything ends up on the list of things that need to be dealt with immediately, it's very easy to decide that a meal break can wait.

It's worth noticing that eating often doesn't have a deadline as obvious as a work assignment or a scheduled meeting. Nobody sends an automatic notification saying, "Your lunch deadline has expired. Please provide an immediate explanation for the delay." So you can postpone a meal without any immediate organizational consequences. You only feel the effects later, when you're hungry, tired, or trying to eat in a hurry.

As a result, a meal often loses not because it's unimportant, but because its necessity is less visible to the people around you and it has no reminder system of its own. A task with a deadline naturally attracts attention. A break that you've neither scheduled nor treated seriously remains easy to postpone.

You can see how this works by observing your decisions for a single day. Every time you postpone a meal, ask yourself: can I genuinely not take a break now, or has something simply appeared that I've decided is more important? This isn't about ignoring your responsibilities. Some situations really do require an immediate response. But it's worth distinguishing genuine necessity from the automatic reflex of answering everything the moment it appears.

Imagine receiving a message asking you to send some information. If the matter doesn't require an immediate response, you can return to it after lunch. If someone asks for a quick conversation, you can suggest a specific time. If a task appears that genuinely cannot be postponed, you may indeed have to change your plans. The key is making a conscious decision rather than automatically assuming that everything appearing on your screen takes priority over your own needs.

Some people find it helpful to communicate their breaks differently. Instead of disappearing without explanation, you can let colleagues know that you're unavailable during a particular period unless something genuinely urgent happens. This won't always be possible, especially if your responsibilities require you to remain constantly available. However, wherever you have some influence over the organization of your work, even a small amount of predictability can reduce unnecessary interruptions.

When You Can't Bring Yourself to Stop Working

There's another, less obvious reason why people postpone meals: difficulty interrupting work they've already started. Sometimes the obstacle isn't a lack of time but the feeling that you cannot walk away until you've finished whatever you're currently doing.

This is particularly noticeable with tasks that have no natural endpoint. You might be answering messages, analyzing documents, preparing a report, or solving a problem that requires concentration. Every new action leads to another one. Just when you think you're close to finishing, something else appears that needs checking. Interrupting your work starts to feel like abandoning something halfway through, even when objectively nothing bad would happen.

In these situations, it helps to establish a stopping point rather than waiting for the entire task to be completed. You don't have to finish everything before taking a break. You simply need to write down where you stopped, what remains to be done, and what your next step will be. That way, when you return, you won't have to reconstruct your entire train of thought.

For example, instead of leaving an open document with the thought, "I'll just polish a few more things," you could write a short note: "Two items still need checking, then send the version for approval." That information gives you a sense of closure, even though the entire task remains unfinished. Taking a break no longer means losing control of your work.

It's also worth checking whether you treat eating as something you can do only after completing all your tasks. In this model, a break becomes a reward for productivity. The problem is that responsibilities rarely come to a definitive end. There's always something else you can improve, check, or add. If you make eating dependent on finishing all your work, you may end up waiting for a moment that never actually arrives.

The change involves recognizing a break as a normal part of the day rather than a privilege granted after completing a sufficient number of tasks. This doesn't mean neglecting your responsibilities. It means including your own needs in the organization of those responsibilities instead of treating them as an obstacle to carrying out your plans.

Lack of Preparation Makes Decisions More Difficult

Another mechanism comes into play when you only start wondering what you're going to eat at the moment you

become hungry. You have to check what's available, make a decision, prepare a meal, or find somewhere to buy one. If you're at home, this might involve several additional steps. If you're away, you also need to consider food availability and the time required to reach a suitable place.

On a quiet day, this isn't much of a problem. On a demanding day, however, it can push your meal even further into the future. Not because you don't want to eat, but because organizing food itself requires too many decisions.

Pay attention to how many things have to happen between the moment you think about lunch and the moment you can actually eat it. Do you need to defrost something? Cook it? Chop ingredients? Pack it? Heat it up? Do you have the right container? Do you know where to buy something that suits your needs? Every additional step increases the likelihood that you'll abandon your plan when you're in a hurry.

This doesn't mean every meal has to be prepared in advance. The point is to reduce the number of decisions you have to make at the most inconvenient moment. If you know that you have very little time in the middle of the day, it makes sense to decide beforehand what will be available. It might be a prepared meal, ingredients you can quickly turn into something to eat, or a familiar place nearby where you can buy food. The specific solution depends on your circumstances, but the principle remains the same: don't leave the entire organization of lunch until the moment when you have the least room for additional tasks.

It's also worth remembering that a lack of preparation doesn't always result from neglect. Sometimes you get home late the previous evening, have other responsibilities, or simply don't have the energy to cook. If your system

requires you to prepare everything from scratch every day, it will be vulnerable to fatigue and unexpected circumstances. That's why we'll later look at solutions that reduce this effort without requiring you to sacrifice a large part of your free time.

Your Surroundings Play a Part Too

Eating regularly doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's influenced by the people you work with, live with, and spend time around. You may have good intentions, but if everyone around you treats breaks as something that can be postponed indefinitely, it's easy to adopt the same way of functioning.

At work, this might mean that meetings regularly take place during lunchtime. At home, someone may need your help just when you're planning to prepare a meal. During shared trips or family responsibilities, meal times may depend on the entire group. You can't always impose your own rhythm, and trying to control everyone around you would be about as effective as persuading the weather not to rain at the weekend.

You can, however, communicate your needs and look for solutions that take other people into account as well. If meetings at work are regularly scheduled during lunchtime, it's worth discussing whether some of them could be moved or whether a short break could be arranged. If everyone at home needs something at roughly the same time, perhaps you can agree in advance on who will be responsible for preparing the meal and when. Not every conversation will lead to a change, but a lack of communication almost guarantees that other people won't know what's making your day difficult to organize.