

Projects for Good

Two Meals a day for Good Health and Sustainability

Ansar Azeez, Quantity Surveyor, Services & Trade Contractors, Oman

Summary

The basic definition of sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Food wastage is as serious an issue as food scarcity. The number of people with obesity is increasing at a same proportion of those people without food to eat. This is caused by the food imbalance in our society.

This project is influenced by a famous quote, "We live in a strange world where the poor walk miles to get food and the rich walk miles to digest food". One of the prominent causes of obesity is over consumption of calories, more than are required for survival. Our ancestors used to cultivate food, walk significant distances for their daily needs, and had extensive physical activities. They developed the traditional three meals a day diet system based on the necessity for food balanced with activity. Unlike our ancestors we have the facility to have food delivered straight to our doorstep, have vehicles for transportation and less time for physical activity. Aren't we overconsuming food and eating away the share of the others? Is a three meal a day diet sustainable for the present generation? These two questions lead to this project.

This project involves eating only two meals a day for example either lunch and dinner or breakfast and lunch. There are several proven health benefits attached with this plan as well as benefits for sustainability. First, it improves the productivity and health of employees, thereby creating a healthy working environment. It also reduces food consumption and wastage; and finally, it helps to secure food for those in real need.

Context

The project is based on a construction site at Salalah in Oman. Within our workforce we have colleagues who understand that being overweight was not good for personal health and were interested in a diet plan such as this. "Projects for Good" was an opportunity to share the two meal a day plan to colleagues and understand the benefits which could be gained through these changes.

Our intention was to donate the equivalent money we saved, by skipping a meal, to those in need. During Friday prayers in our local mosque, we saw widows, infants and children begging for food and money. As our one meal was costing around 10 OMR (26 GBP) per person per month, we decided to purchase milk and fresh juices for them and give this along with the money saved in that week. It created a sense of satisfaction as our diet was visibly helping a good cause.

Aims

- Identify staff from the office who are looking for a weight loss plan
- Implement a two meal a day plan for those staff
- Donate the non-consumed meal's equivalent in the form of money or food to those in need

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The Project

To understand the effects and benefits of two meal a day on personal health, qualitative research was conducted. From desktop research it was found that the meal plan, also referred to as 'intermittent fasting' would aid in weight loss. It also helps individuals to work actively as it reduces feeling of lethargy from over-eating. There have also been studies which suggest that there could be improvements to memory capabilities. While fasting a process called autophagy, the waste removal system of cells, is induced. This helps to reduce the risk of diseases as cells are repairing at a greater rate. The risk of type 2 diabetes can also be reduced by reducing the blood sugar level during fasting. Furthermore, this can protect against kidney damage, one of the most severe complications from diabetes. Overall, this diet plan can boost health and therefore extend the lifespan.

Two meals a day diet plan is simple, the traditional diet of three meals a day is reduced to two. Individuals either eat breakfast and lunch or lunch and dinner, and fast for the rest of the day. Participants of this project were working professionals therefore restrictions could not be imposed on them, such as which meal to skip, what to eat on each meal, how many calories to consume. The objective was to skip one meal in that particular day and not to overeat during the other meals.

The health benefits of the plan were clearly conveyed, and no one was forced to enter this project. Initially 12 of our colleagues agreed to be part of the project but at the halfway point seven had discontinued this plan, those have been excluded from the table below. All were found to be medically fit, no conditions such as diabetes

or high blood pressure were found. Though some were a little uncomfortable with skipping a meal at first, they adjusted within a couple of weeks.

Personal Impact

The topic of sustainability always attracted me while I was studying at UCEM. I have personally observed that UCEM always emphasises the topic of sustainability and covered it in various modules throughout the semester. When I first came across Projects for Good, I was indeed very keen on joining this initiative since it was on the topic of sustainability. I decided to link sustainability to a new subject/path which I had not previously approached. Thus, in this project, sustainability was linked with a diet plan. I was successful in implementing this plan with my colleagues who were personally benefitted by weight loss. Many health benefits listed in the qualitative research could not be measured, but it was evident that they felt very comfortable working with their half-loaded stomach. I feel extremely happy to have guided a team towards a healthy lifestyle and at the same time cultivated a habit of donating to those in need which feels like a blessing.



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Results

The main aim of the project was to identify individuals from the office who were looking for a weight loss plan and implement a two meal a day diet plan among these staff members. This was achieved and from the results obtained it shows that the weight of participants had reduced over the course of four months. The reduction ranged from 3.89-5.89kg and this reduction can be directly attributed to the diet since no other lifestyle changes, such as exercise, were introduced during these four months. This would have a positive impact on productivity of the staff. The reduction in weight reduces the risk of many dangerous diseases, thus enabling a healthy working atmosphere.

Another aim of the project was donating the saved meal's equivalent in the form of money or food to those in need. This aim was achieved by donating fresh juice and fruits to widowed women and children every week with the money saved from the skipped meal. The project had limitations in terms of measuring the full range of benefits, however, food consumption and thereby wastage was reduced and the savings donated to those in need.

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"Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". (Brundtland 1987).

Brundtland (1987) 'Our Common Future, Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development', From A/42/427. Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, UN Documents: 'Gathering a body of global agreements' [online] NGO Committee on Education of the Conference of NGOs. Available at: <http://un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm> [accessed 18 May 2020]

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