



# Effects of a healthy lifestyle on staff productivity in the hotel industry of East London, Eastern Cape

Zwelethu Mtshokotshe\* & Dinesh Vallabh  
Department of Tourism, Hospitality & Sport Management  
Walter Sisulu University [East London Campus]  
South Africa  
Email: [zmtshokotshe@wsu.ac.za](mailto:zmtshokotshe@wsu.ac.za)

Corresponding author\*

## Abstract

The study sought to investigate the effects of a healthy lifestyle on staff productivity in a sample of businesses in the hotel industry in the city of East London, South Africa. A healthy workforce enables productivity in an organisation, and in the hotel industry this is also no exception. The hotel industry is pressurised in its nature, and healthy employees can contribute to enhancing good services thus good nutrition is needed. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilised in the study in order to gain a more conclusive result. A questionnaire comprising of both open and closed ended questions were utilised to collect the data. The questionnaires were distributed at selected hotels in East London. A total of 45 questionnaires were included in the statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data analysis focused on the experiences of respondents with a lifestyle on staff productivity in the hotel industry in East London. The study elucidated that 46% of staff in the hotel industry of East London did not fully comprehend the concept of healthy living. The findings of the study will provide a basis for the managers of the hotels to address the challenges and improve healthy living. The study concludes with recommendations on how to promote living a healthy lifestyle, thereby also hopefully promoting efficiency within the hospitality industry since undernourished employees do not perform at optimum levels. Hotel managers are also encouraged to develop appropriate training on nutrition and empowerment programmes that promote a healthy lifestyle for their employees.

**Keywords:** Health, lifestyle, staff productivity, hotel industry, South Africa

## Introduction

The promotion of healthy living and leading an acceptable lifestyle has been at the top of the World Health Organisation's agenda for a long time. In the United States of America, nutritional value, cleanliness, quality and taste are considered to be the most important factors when consuming food products. In Canada, seating capacity and nutritional value are the most important factors when it comes to identifying preferences when selecting fast food chains at which to indulge in a meal (Prabhu, Nayak & Nivedita, 2016). In South Africa, the Diabetes Focus, (2014-2015) reports that physical exercise and a good diet are pivotal factors for a healthy lifestyle. Against this backdrop, it is vital for society to be sensitized to the importance of eating a healthy and balanced diet. The pattern in which we consume food is widely influenced by the way we think (Allen, 2007) and it is thus imperative to inculcate a culture of a healthy lifestyle from an early age, and this is a trend that should be passed on from generation to generation.

Diseases such as bulimia and obesity-related illnesses can easily be avoided if only society was equipped with the correct information on how to avoid such diseases (Davies & Board, 1998). The impact of poverty and inadequate education has for a long time been associated with an unhealthy lifestyle, where communities lacked the necessary information and resources to help themselves to eat well (Davies & Board, 1998). Allen (2007) contends that



the hospitality industry plays an important role in cultural diversification due to the fact that it employs and serves people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. For example, food is considered a prominent cultural activity among Indians and it reflects the country's diversified culture (Prabhu & Nayak, 2016). Such notions are similarly important in South Africa.

Having a healthy workforce in the hospitality industry is very important in its drive to meet its goals and objectives in satisfying customer needs and wants. The take-away food industry has been an important economic arm of the economy as it creates jobs (Nathan, 2009), and provides convenient food for the busy work force and also in school environments. In a study by Prabhu & Nayak conducted in India (2016) the majority of respondents preferred pizza, combo meals and burgers, followed by milkshakes and juices as beverages of choice. However, the effects of the fast food have somehow outdone its benefits when it comes to health issues. When hotel employees consume fast foods on a daily basis they are unlikely to be effective as they could be and the effects of their indulgence reflect in their abilities to perform well at work. Locally, despite the South African Department of Health's regulations, food production methods and ingredients used in this sector leave much to be desired, as a significant percentage of products is deemed to be unhealthy (Allen, 2007).

Despite many calls from health officials across the country for citizens to practise good eating habits and consume foods consisting of proteins, carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables, many families still do not understand the importance of a balanced diet and its benefit (Esmare, 2007). Fibre substances obtained mainly from vegetables and cereals play a vital role in maintaining a desirable flow of food consumed, hence facilitating effective digestion. It is essential to ensure the correct intake of food on a regular basis, since shortage of fibre in the body can lead to a deficiency of vital nutrients (Allen, 2007).

According to health experts Burke and Deakin (2005), human beings should consume food in relation to their body requirements. Excessive intake of energy giving foods, as well as poor food preparation, can lead to overweight or obese conditions which may in turn lead to health complications and even death, when consumed in excess. It is also necessary to advise hotel employees to exercise regularly in order to keep healthy and fit so as to effectively operate (Jones, Martin & Pilbin, 2000). Employees in hotels must be sensitized to the different ways of food preservation so as to ensure healthy meals are prepared from fresh ingredients which would provide them with a balanced meal and lead to greater productivity. Excessive consumption of fatty foods and sugars has the tendency to make employees lethargic, when what is desirable is employees with sharp reactions focused on customer service.

### **Purpose for the study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether or not a healthy lifestyle contributes to staff productivity in the hotel industry in East London, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The researchers worked towards establishing the significance of a healthy lifestyle and steps that can be taken to ensure that employees are equipped with the necessary information about diet and exercise, in line with what is considered to be a healthy lifestyle. The literature suggests that a healthy body means a sound mind and a healthy physical body leads to greater competence and maximum performance possibilities.

### **Problem statement**

The hospitality industry is characterised by long working hours which can lead to fatigue and ultimately burnout (Mokaya & Gitari, 2012). Employees are faced with health challenges as they often have to work irregular hours. As such, the different and very often opposing views on what a healthy lifestyle means in and for the hotel industry is at the heart of the problem to



be investigated. The focus of the study was on healthy lifestyles in the hospitality industry and specifically addresses hotel sector employees.

## **Objectives**

- To explore whether a healthy lifestyle contributes positively to enhanced staff morale and productivity in the hotel industry;
- To determine if a relationship exists between the lifestyle of hotel industry employees and productivity; and
- To establish how hospitality industry employees can be informed about a healthy lifestyle and encouraged to develop one.

## **Motivation for the research**

Living healthily means leading a reasonable lifestyle, ranging from regular medical check-ups, a drug abuse free life, adequate exercise, and more importantly, consuming food which provides a balanced diet. The hospitality industry is one of the most essential sectors, not only to the South African economy, but also globally. It also promotes cultural diversification in society. Having healthy employees' has been proved to lead to their greater efficiency, improved performance, greater levels of guest satisfaction, and of course, enhanced profitability for the business. The study thus focuses on the promotion of healthy living and employee wellness which is pivotal to achieving a positive work performance. Eating healthy foods and regular exercise has an immediate impact on people's cognition, and physical exertion before a task can increase concentration, and that exercise can even have a positive effect on mental health and thus influences productivity levels.

## **Literature review**

The global economic down-turn has provided both challenges and opportunities to the ready food and beverage and hospitality sectors. On the one hand, consumers are trading down from premium to more budget items, and on the other hand, dietary requirements are either compromised, or partly taken into account. Health is still a driver in new product development with some of the major take away outlets trying to venture into low calorie food items (Nathan, 2009). The key to ready meals is their convenience factor, however, without careful attention to what they purchase and the frequency of purchases, the consumers might find themselves on the wrong side of health issues given that most of the take away outlets do not prepare their food products in the healthiest way possible and use what are unhealthy products. Except for healthy salads and a few other food items, most take away food products are prepared through deep frying methods of cooking which is deemed to be unhealthy as cholesterol levels of such foods don't correspond to the permitted daily intake of fats and lipids that are recommended for healthy consumption.

The literature suggests that it is not only cheaper to frequently eat homemade food, but it is also healthier, as one has a choice on which food ingredients they want include in their meal as well as the quality and quantity. They also have the choice of selecting the preparation method. Young individuals especially schoolchildren, consider take-aways and packaged meals to be fancy and fashionable. The working class and business people generally tend to consume take-aways because of their convenience factor and due to the fact that their busy lifestyles do not allow them to have sit down meals (Burke & Deakin, 2005). This is in itself an indictment of society where family lifestyles are changing to meet the rapidly growing 'rat-race'



which is bent on materialism before anything else. Quality time is needed to prepare and also to consume quality healthy food items.

### **Working conditions and motivation to healthy**

Working conditions must be suitable for productivity to be high. For example, when front desk employees keep on their feet this is tiring. The use of standing desks could be a good alternative to traditional desks used in hotels. Sit-stand desks are ideal and allow employees at the front desk to transition between the two and they offer a solution. Standing desks are not effective for all employees, but when employees are obese they could benefited from using them. Their main advantage is in that they prevent people from sitting down for long periods of time, which in itself is an action which puts them at greater risk of developing health conditions.

Managers must encourage their employees to live a healthy lifestyle as this is a win-win for both sides. The key is to offer incentives in a way that benefits the employees, maybe have a financial reward for employees to be motivated to be healthier. Health promotional incentives and even organisational policies designed to support healthy behaviour, both in the workplace and to overall improve health outcomes of all employees, would go a long way to increasing employee productivity.

### **Body size in relation to energy requirements**

Much of the relationship between bodyweight and lifestyle can best be understood in the broader context of energy requirements for daily living. Health experts assert that human bodies require energy according to one's physical weight. The larger the body, the larger the energy requirement, hence, the greater the amount of carbohydrate needed for its daily supply (Logue, 1986).

These requirements according to Kleiber's law (2008) as cited in Hulbert (2014) are described by the equation  $BMR = KW^b 0.75$ , where:

- |             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| B-basal     | K- constant    |
| M-metabolic | BW-body weight |
| R-Rate      |                |

Body Mass Index widely known as (BMI) is calculated by taking human weight in kilograms divided by one's height in metres and then multiplied by two. Thus,  $BM = W (kg) / H (m) (2)$ . The acceptable weight is then determined by the results of the equation. The literature suggests that the acceptable body mass index should be plus or minus 25. Any amount below 20 is termed as underweight and contentious, while between 26 and 30 is termed as an overweight condition. Where individual with body mass is over 30, such persons are termed as obese (Jones, Martin & Pilbin, 2000). It follows that food intake should ideally be in accordance with work or exercise being done in a particular period of time. Large consumption of energy giving foods over a long period of time, can and often does, invariably lead to one being overweight. Thus, one should also consider the energy required for daily operation in the workplace (Burke & Deakin, 2005). According to current research, there is a strong correlation between being healthy and being productive in the workplace. When employees engage in even one unhealthy behaviour, this can and likely will lead to a decrease in productivity. An unhealthy diet has revealed a 66% decrease in productivity to employees who know which foods are healthier to consume.



Food preparation methods, the quality and the choice of foodstuffs, plays a very important role when it comes to the weight of people. Although the deep frying method of cooking is opted for by many, and very popular, caution should be taken when food is prepared using this method since it leads to one consuming excess fat which is not required in one's body in one sitting (Ogilvie, 2010). When choosing food ingredients, one needs to exercise prudence by reading the labels so as to determine the amount of calories contained, especially on pre-packaged items. Making healthy food choices then clearly plays a crucial role in weight regulation. For example, fruits and leafy vegetables are to be consumed in large quantities as they do not contain lots of fats or specifically animal fats which are dangerous for the human body. Food ingredients considered to be high in calories should thus be consumed with caution (Burke & Deakin, 2005).

### **Food handling and chronic diseases**

Safe handling of food is important for healthy living. Various governmental agencies including local, state and local have somewhat overlapping responsibilities for monitoring the practices of food handling. Meat is usually inspected at the slaughterhouses in most countries, milk is checked by inspectors, and the sanitary practices of dairy farmers are also scrutinized (Snook, 1984).

Given the foregoing discussion, it is argued, that it is not possible for people to live a healthy life, unless the quality and safety of food consumed is prepared with caution and with health considerations in the manufacturers mind. It is important to wash food ingredients before preparation, so as to ensure that hygiene is maintained. Likewise, fruits and vegetables need to be fresh and clean, either raw eaten or when cooked. Like any other hygiene processes, clean food preparation is essential before final consumption. Surfaces where food is prepared and packaged, including dishes and crockery, should not only be clean, but also disinfected to kill any possible germs. The lack of cleanliness may cause contamination with devastating ill-health effects such as salmonella or botulism for the unsuspecting consumers (Snook, 1984).

Seemingly, there is also a lack of understanding regarding the importance of proper food storage and preservation methods. Storage either at home, by manufacturing companies or in transportation facilities should be carefully controlled to avoid contamination which may result in food poisoning. For example, canned food should be refrigerated after opening and milk should be pasteurized to destroy bacteria. Food produce should be transported in refrigerated trucks to prevent it from decaying. It is also of great importance to teach the different communities in our society, the safe and accepted ways of food preservation and preparation, so as to ensure that food which is consumed is as safe to eat, hygienic and fresh as it possibly can be (Miller & Hayes, 1995).

### **Chronic diseases and their impact**

When it comes to chronic diseases affecting workplace productivity, this refers to persistent medical conditions that last more than three months. Examples of such termed diseases are chronic renal failure, diabetes, hepatitis and heart diseases (Chronic diseases, 2009). Most of the chronic diseases are related to an unhealthy lifestyle and clearly what one consumes may play a role in the manifestation of the disease. High blood pressure has been linked to excessive sodium consumption while diabetes is linked to excessive sugar intake. Lung cancer is linked to a lifestyle choice of smoking and several sexually transmitted diseases are also lifestyle linked. Chronic diseases differ from one another depending on the cause and



effect they have in the body. While some of these illnesses can be treated and cured, some result into long term changes in the body caused by poor eating and other dangerous lifestyle choices and many end up as incurable resulting to prolonged or lifetime usage of medication and less productivity or no productivity in the workplace (Chronic diseases, 2009). A conscious effort by one to follow a healthy lifestyle will be beneficial to an individual and also to their employer and in the industry to the hotel guests the employees serve.

### **Healthy digestion**

The health of the entire body is maintained when the colon is working optimally, which is why for centuries natural practitioners have initiated the treatment of disease by treating and clearing the colon first (Esmare, 2007). Digestion is the process by which food is processed in the body, in a form which can be absorbed or excreted. This process is vital as important food nutrients needed for the body functioning cannot be fully absorbed into the body system for utilization, if there is abnormal movement in the colon. Several remedies are available in the market, which assist with the easy flow of digestion in the colon including herbal supplements, fibre and pre-biotic supplements, digestive enzyme formulas and high potency probiotics (Nathan, 2009). The common problem associated with digestion is constipation, which is attributed to the intake of a diet low in fibre or an inadequate water supply in the body. Health experts advise on consumption of at least eight glasses of water per day accompanied by fibre consumption which can be easily obtained from cereal, fruits and vegetables. A constipated system is one in which the transition time of toxic wastes is slow and may over time cause mechanical problems including hemorrhoids, varicose veins and hiatus hernia which are all conditions which gravely affect productivity. The longer the transit time of food wastes in the colon, the more time for proteins and fats to become rancid, and for carbohydrates to ferment (Esmare, 2007). The human colon should hold up to three meals in its healthy status, however, due to poor food choices and low water consumption levels, some individuals hold up to eight meals in their system which expose them to health complications including arthritis, cancer and immune system dysfunction. Further negative implications manifest themselves in form of deficiency of crucial nutrients in the body as their absorption is impaired by indigestion and congestion of digestive system which makes it difficult for people to work effectively (Lillicrap & Cousins, 2006).

### **Research methods**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the study. In total, fifty questionnaires were distributed at three selected hotels in East London. Questionnaires were distributed to the hotel employees after permission was obtained from the hotel general managers' for ethical purposes, and their consent was obtained. This was followed by the data collection process. Questionnaires consisted of both open and closed ended questions in relation to the value of a healthy lifestyle on employee productivity levels. Forty-five questionnaires were successfully completed, however only forty usable questionnaires were included in the statistical analysis. The study achieved a response rate of 80% from the original amount distributed. The data analysis consisted of the revelation of respondents of their lifestyle choices on their productivity levels in their respective hotels.

### **Findings of the study**



The study elucidated that staff (46%), did not understand the concept of a healthy living. Approximately, 75% of the respondents revealed that they did not read the nutrition content values on the labels of purchased items. When further probed as to how many times a month the management talks to the staff about health issues, it was interesting to note that 60% of the respondents indicated that management had not spoken to them about health issues at all. While 26% said they had been spoken to on health issues at least once. Fourteen percent claimed that management mentioned health issues only twice a month. The study highlighted that management did not communicate to staff about health related issues on a regular basis. This formed one of the important questions geared towards establishing the responsibility of management towards the employees in relation to health issues and how these might impact their productivity levels.

An equal number of respondents (40%) had attained a Grade 12 certificate or higher (diploma levels) of education while 20% had a degree. It was also established, that the level of education has an impact on the way people handled health related and lifestyle issues. Respondents (20%) with degrees happened to be more sensitive and aware of health related matters. The study also ascertained that 60% of the respondents were female while 40% were male. It was further established that different age groups reacted differently to health issues. Most respondents below the age of thirty, seemed to be reluctant to partake in any form of exercise as opposed to their counterparts in the age range of thirty to forty years of age who were willing to do so.

### **Limitations and suggestions of the study**

In order to practice a healthy lifestyle, it is suggested that the hotel employees consume fresh produce, especially fruits and vegetables, on a regular basis. Important to note was the fact that the level of education of respondents plays pivotal role when it comes to making healthy lifestyle and consumption choices. It is recommended that respondents and their employers should invest in meaningful and ongoing health education exercises so as to maintain a healthy workforce. It is further recommended, that respondents should commit themselves to regular exercise in order to burn off excessive calories and maintain high fitness levels as required by their vocations. Importantly, management should sensitise their employees to health-related issues as 60% of the sample indicated that management never spoke of health issues at all. Healthy food consumption is a must, given that the human body requires different nutrients in order to function properly, and these essential nutrients are attained from eating a balanced diet daily, followed by adequate water consumption. It is recommended that eating a balanced diet and consuming adequate volumes of water is essential towards a healthy lifestyle and results in optimum physical performance which supports productivity enhancement. Hotel owners should ensure employees are considering and adopting health incentives by rewarding them after they reach milestones and such gains, such as one losing weight, could be celebrated in staff meetings. Many health conscious hotel companies forge a partnership with a local gyms and they offer discounted memberships for all employees and this has been shown to pay off. Hotels can provide employees with the necessary means to live a healthy lifestyle and they can promote healthy eating options in the staff dining room by offering free salads and fruit to employees every day.

The limitations of the study should be considered in interpreting the findings. The empirical research was limited to only three hotels based in East London. Therefore, this study is regionally specific and only applicable to the region known as the Eastern Cape and hence, not generalizable to the whole of South Africa. Future studies could consider other provinces where lifestyle choices may be found to be different.



## Conclusion

Healthy living is crucial to the well the being of the society and for the development of any community. It is necessary for the workforce to be equipped with information on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Success in the hospitality industry, like any other sector in the economy is largely influenced by the quality of the workforce and their standards of health. Employees need to be aware of the importance of a balanced diet, and this goes as much for meals at work as it does in their own home. Having healthy employees more likely leads to a happy work environment, and hence improved morale and performance as well as greater profitability in any organisation manifest themselves. The findings of the study revealed limited insight into problems affecting workers in the hotel industry. The study concluded that a healthy lifestyle has a positive effect on employee productivity and therefore has important implications for the hotel industry and its workforce in general. The simple fact is that a healthy person has more energy available for work.

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