

Drinking Your Meals

Many working adults do not have enough time to cook. After a long day at the office, a commute home, and family responsibilities, preparing a proper meal can feel like too much work. For a long time, the usual answer was ordering fast food or heating up a frozen dinner. Today, more and more people are trying something completely different. Instead of eating their meals, they are drinking them.

This idea is not as new as it might seem. Since the 1950s, people in the fitness world have used protein powders to help build muscle. These products were sold mainly to weightlifters and stayed in that small world for many years. That began to change when companies started telling a new story about their products.

The most important moment came in 2013, when a software engineer in San Francisco named Rob Rhinehart created a drink called Soylent. Rhinehart believed that cooking and eating took too much time. His drink contained carbohydrates, vitamins, and other things the body needs. The idea became very popular in Silicon Valley, where many tech workers already skipped lunch to keep working. With Soylent, meals were no longer a break in the day. They were just a problem that had been solved. Soylent quickly became a symbol of a work culture that valued productivity above everything else.

Things did not go well forever. In 2016, some customers got sick after using one of the company's products, and those items had to be recalled. The company changed its leaders several times and was eventually sold in 2023. Today, its sales are going down, and Rhinehart reportedly now lives quietly on a farm.

Even though Soylent struggled, it opened the door for many new companies. Today's brands focus more on health and wellness than on saving time at work. Huel, a British company, sells shakes, powders, and easy hot meals. By 2024, it was making close to \$290 million a year. Another brand, Ka'Chava, sells bags of nutritional powder for around \$70 each. A newer company called Liquid+ sells blended vegetables in small pouches and became popular on social media. The whole market is expected to be worth \$7 billion by 2035.

Most people who buy these products are simply tired and busy. They just want to remove one more decision from their day. Many parents, students, and shift workers say these drinks are a practical answer to a real problem. A shake is better than snacks from a vending machine or skipping a meal completely.

There are, however, some concerns. A study found that several popular powders contained dangerous levels of heavy metals, including lead. One product had more than fifteen times the amount of lead that health authorities consider safe. Unlike medicines, these products do not go through strict government checks before they are sold, which makes it difficult for consumers to know which ones are truly safe.

Health experts also point out that chewing plays an important role in digestion and in feeling full. When people drink their calories quickly, they may not feel satisfied and could end up snacking more later. Most dietitians agree that whole foods are still the best option, but a good quality shake is better than eating nothing at all.

Beyond nutrition, there is something else to think about. For a very long time, meals have given our days a natural rhythm. They are moments to stop, rest, and spend time with others. When a full meal becomes something you finish in thirty seconds, that rhythm starts to disappear. Convenience is certainly valuable, but removing real meals from our daily lives might come at a cost that is simply too hard to swallow.

- 1) What does a typical lunch break look like for you?
- 2) Do you ever skip meals because you are too busy?
- 3) Why do you think so many people find cooking difficult to fit into their daily lives?
- 4) Would you drink a meal replacement shake instead of eating a proper meal?
- 5) Is eating alone at your desk the same as eating with other people?
- 6) Do you think people in Korea are becoming busier than previous generations?
- 7) Is convenience more important than tradition when it comes to food?
- 8) If a product is popular and convenient but possibly unsafe, would you still use it?
- 9) Do you think meal replacement products will become more common in Korea in the future?
- 10) Do you think companies should be more strictly controlled when it comes to the safety of their products?

Commute	(v)	to travel regularly between home and work or school	She commutes by subway every morning and uses the time to listen to podcasts.
Proper	(adj)	real or correct in the way something should be	After days of eating snacks, he finally sat down to a proper meal at a restaurant.
Mainly	(adv)	mostly; more than anything else	The course is mainly online, but students meet in person once a month.
Small world	(exp)	a small, specific group of people who share the same interest or activity	Back then, electric cars were only known within a small world of engineers and researchers.
Carbohydrate	(n)	nutrients found in foods like bread, rice, and pasta that give the body energy	Athletes often eat foods high in carbohydrates before a big race.
Skip	(v)	to not do something that you usually do or should do	He was so busy that he decided to skip lunch and finish the report instead.

Recall	(v)	to officially ask customers to return a product because it may be unsafe	The company had to recall thousands of bottles after a problem was found during testing.
Reportedly	(adv)	according to what people say, though it has not been confirmed	The director is reportedly working on a new film, but nothing has been announced yet.
Struggle	(v)	to have difficulty doing something	Many students struggle with time management when they first start university.
Blended	(adj)	mixed together until smooth using a machine	The soup was blended until it had a smooth, creamy texture.
Shift worker	(n)	people who work at different times of the day or night, including early mornings or late hours	Shift workers often find it difficult to maintain a regular sleep schedule.
Practical	(adj)	useful and suitable for a real situation	The training was very practical, with lots of hands-on exercises instead of just theory.
Vending machine	(n)	a machine that sells drinks, snacks, or other small items when you put money in	The office vending machine was always empty by Friday afternoon.
Consider	(v)	to think of something in a particular way; to regard as	This neighborhood is considered one of the safest in the city.
Strict	(adj)	strongly enforced; not allowing exceptions	The school has strict rules about mobile phones during class.
Truly	(adv)	completely or genuinely	It was truly surprising to see how quickly the business had grown.
Point out	(phr v)	to tell someone about a fact or piece of information	The doctor pointed out that sitting at a desk all day can affect your posture.
Play an important role	(exp)	to be an important part of something	Regular feedback plays an important role in helping employees improve their performance.
Satisfied	(adj)	feeling that you have had enough; content	After the long hike, they sat down for a meal and finally felt satisfied.
Beyond	(prep)	more than; outside the limits of	The benefits of regular exercise go beyond just physical health.

Rhythm	(n)	a regular, repeated pattern of events or activities	Moving to a new city completely disrupted her daily rhythm for the first few months.
Certainly	(adv)	without any doubt; definitely	The new policy will certainly affect how employees plan their working hours.
Too hard to swallow	(idm)	too difficult to accept or believe	The company's excuse for the delay was too hard to swallow for most of its customers.

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