

Are you getting the sustenance your body needs on the road? Sound engineer Aston Fearon would like you to think about it . . .

# Food for thought?

Our industry is probably one that could do with some improvement when it comes to looking after ourselves and how we eat. Our irregular hours, focus on a high standard of production and high work ethic sometimes lead us to neglect or push our bodies in ways that are harmful to us and maybe even our production - sometimes without us realising.

I was excited though to see SiPA's (Sustainability in Production Alliance) recent goals, including goal number two on 'well-being' - which includes creating "a culture which recognises that burnout is no longer a badge of honour and rejects the norm of funerals in our fifties". In relation to this, let me talk about subsistence - a topic I feel is too often overlooked on many projects.

Eating decent food in a timely manner increases and preserves brain function - the ability of the brain to be alert, solve problems and to make good decisions. When all these attributes are present our brains are probably producing what scientists call 'Alpha' brainwaves. This is usually evidenced by being calm but alert and is beneficial for working in the high-pressure circumstances in which we often find ourselves.

How we eat can affect our brain function quite dramatically. We all need a certain amount of food energy (around 2000Kcal per day for a woman, to 2500Kcal for a man) to maintain our current body weight, and a certain amount of water to stay adequately hydrated (around eight cups or two litres per day). Because our job is usually pretty physical we may sometimes need a few more calories than the average person to maintain good energy levels throughout the day. So what might a good working day look like when it comes to nutrition?

I get to the venue at 10am. I start brushing up on the tech spec and getting the desk booted up to pink the PA. I start getting mics, stands, DIs, cables etc. ready. It's 10.45 (15 minutes before the band are due to start loading in) and I usually have a slight dip in energy between 10.30 and 11.30 so I have a granola bar in my pocket which I crack open while chatting with my monitor tech and waiting for the band to arrive. Five minutes later I feel my energy starting to rise again, which will carry me all the way through until lunchtime. In the meantime, I chat to the band's tour manager and I am alert and attentive to what he is saying as I feel the glucose kicking in throughout my body.

By the time I'm back at the desk it's usually somewhere around lunchtime, so I'll start eating my sandwiches then - this is usually before sound-check - and top-up my energy again. My brain feels calm and alert and I'm able to spot potential problems before they arise - and to solve problems



quickly if they do. As the afternoon draws to a close, sound-checks are finished and doors are about to open. I take my dinner (leftover stir fry - in a microwaveable plastic container) out of the crew fridge and stick it in the microwave. The slow-release carbs in the noodles and potatoes will keep me going for the next five hours (until I get home and go to bed, probably) while the sugars from the veg and soy sauce will kick in pretty quickly, ready for the show, and I'll feel alert and focussed again.

I won't have any of the sugar crash you get with a can of coke, and the vitamins and nutrients will boost my brain function instead. I can really feel the effects of this during a rapid changeover. Amidst the hive of activity on stage everything is so much more clear, and my brain doesn't sink into any kind of sluggishness, which often comes from having had no food - or junk food.

All throughout the day I have been drinking water periodically. Sometimes I'm offered some form of alcoholic beverage; I always turn it down because alcohol is a depressant and dulls the senses - I don't want my sense of hearing to be diminished in any way and I don't want my reaction times to be slowed down. I generally always turn down Coke or Red Bull too, because it would mean that my energy would take a huge dip at some point: I avoid this happening for the show, but also for the drive home.

The pattern of how you structure your eating throughout the day will most likely vary depending on the day's workload - whether you are working for a hire company, tuning the PA, or only taking on mixing responsibilities etc. Generally though, I find that there are enough hours in the working day to eat three meals and even the odd snack here and there too - or at least there should be!

Eating properly is important. Making sure I eat properly is a crucial part of making sure I maintain a high level of productivity and that I do a good job for whoever I'm working for. Sometimes I think technicians and production managers don't want to raise the issue of subsistence too much because we might think we're being a nuisance to the end client in some way. The odds are though, that if we don't take responsibility for our food requirements or pipe up when we need to, we will just be forgotten about - and in many ways it is our responsibility.

The best companies I have worked for all take their technicians' well-being and subsistence seriously. The best experiences I've had working for venues have been at those which, as well as having well maintained technology, also look after their crew by allowing access to a fridge and a microwave - basic technology in comparison to what we mix our shows on! If excellence in production is what we are seeking to achieve, maybe we should think twice when we think about skipping lunch.