



Attention Employers:
Increase Success in the Workplace
for the Employee with Prader-Willi Syndrome:
Limit Access to Food

For most if not all individuals with Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS), having food accessible in the workplace will impede their ability to concentrate and perform the task at hand because their mind will be more focused upon how to obtain that food item. To maximize performance and minimize behavioral problems, employers must control access to food items throughout the worksite. For most worksites, it is realistic and manageable to make relatively minor changes to accommodate the employee with PWS in order to help him be a productive, valued and valuable employee.

Prader-Willi syndrome is a serious medical disorder that interferes with the body's appetite regulating centers. Individuals with PWS do not feel satiated or "full" no matter how much food is eaten. The signals to the brain continuously and relentlessly drive someone with PWS to seek out and eat more food. People with PWS metabolize food at about half the normal rate, so someone with PWS can gain weight at a tremendous rate on just a few extra calories. In addition, people with PWS can experience severe gastric illnesses which can, particularly after overeating, lead to a life-threatening situation (thinner individuals may be at even greater risk).

Keeping food items out of sight and inaccessible will help reduce behavioral problems in the workplace. It must be understood that for the individual with PWS there is no "behavior modification" or "learning" to control oneself in regard to food. It is not realistic to expect that someone with PWS can modify his behavior toward taking the bag of chips or eating others' lunches if that food is available no matter *how* many tokens or prizes incentivize the person not to take food. While the individual with PWS may be able to manage his behavior for a day or even a week or two, this does not constitute genuine modified behavior; there will come a day when the person, despite his knowing that he should not, will take that bag of chips or eat other lunches and eat them as quickly as he can, thus also creating a choking risk in addition to putting themselves at risk for severe gastric illness. *Individuals with PWS know they're not supposed to eat "out of bounds" foods; they simply cannot overcome their biochemical drive to eat.*

It is often helpful to someone with PWS to post the day's work schedule, including snack and lunch breaks. Having a concrete schedule to view and refer to can be quite helpful. Keeping employee lunches and other food items in a manager's office or in some other secured area is highly recommended. Limiting access to vending machines and/or limiting access to money that may be used to purchase food items from the cafeteria, mobile food trucks, local fast-food restaurants, etc. is also highly recommended.