

Q&A From the Bais HaVaad Halacha Hotline

Lunch and Learn

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Q During my lunch break, I leave work and go to a local bais midrash to learn. May I eat a snack there?

A The Shulchan Aruch says that it is forbidden to eat and drink in a bais midrash or bais knessess (O.C. 151:1) because doing so, among other mundane activities he lists, is considered degrading to the holiness of the place.



One exception is mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.): A *talmid chacham* may eat and drink in a bais midrash so as not to waste time from his studies.

The *poskim* write that this exception is not limited to *talmidei chachamim*; any person who routinely studies in a bais midrash is included in this exception if his learning will be disturbed by having to relocate in order to eat. So you may indeed eat your snack while you learn (Piskei Teshuvos ibid.).

Many batei midrash today are established initially on the condition that they may be used for other purposes (per Shulchan Aruch ibid. 11). Still, the dignity of the bais midrash must be preserved, so one may only eat a *seudas mitzvah*, e.g., *Shalosh Seudos*, a *siyum*, etc. (Mishnah Brurah ibid. 20; see also Sha'ar Hatziyun ibid.). But eating and drinking for non-mitzvah purposes, *sichah beteilah* (idle talk, which would include business phone calls), and similar mundane activities are still forbidden despite the stipulation.

Note that the dispensation to eat in the bais midrash while learning only obtains for the duration of your learning session. Once you finish learning, you must finish your food elsewhere, as you're no longer involved in Torah study.