

Healthy Catering Guide

Your guide to serving healthy foods at meetings and events

Why serve healthy foods at meetings and events?

By and large, employees are not meeting the minimum needs of high-nutrient dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains, in their overall diet. Trends in diet quality show a rise in consumption of high calorie, low-nutrient food choices (such as foods high in refined grains, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat and sodium).

The workplace environment can influence what and how much an employee eats. Several worksite intervention studies have shown that making improvements in food preparation and access to healthy ready-to-eat foods as effective strategies for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption or reducing fat intake. Increasing the availability of healthy foods and beverages served at work, as well as decreasing less healthy choices supports employees in making better food and beverage choices. Healthy choices need to be easy to make at work, at home and in our communities.

Making healthy choices is difficult when employees are surrounded with poor food options throughout their day. Employees typically consume at least one meal at work and snacks are often provided in meetings, on breaks or at other company-sponsored events. Support your employees by making healthy choices available, accessible and identifiable, so that it's easier for them to make the healthy choice.

Give this guide to anyone who orders food for meetings or events in your organization. It provides step-by-step instructions for selecting, ordering and identifying healthy food.

Providing healthy food can be easy. A few simple changes can make your employees feel like you care about their health and well-being. Serve plenty of fruit, vegetables and whole grains, and keep nutrient-poor, calorie heavy food and beverages to a minimum. Thoughtful preparation and planning will ensure you have food that tastes great and everyone can enjoy.

Get started by following the few simple steps in this guide.

Selecting caterers

STEP 1

- ⇒ Compile a list of individuals who historically attend meetings and events at your organization where food is provided. Ask individuals to provide any dietary restrictions or preferences such as the following:
- Vegetarian (specify whether employee eats dairy and/or eggs)
 - Vegan
 - Gluten-free
 - Specific food allergies or intolerances
 - Other
- ⇒ Make a list of these requests to discuss with your caterer.
- ⇒ Make the list readily available to anyone who orders food.

STEP 2

- ⇒ Ask local caterers and restaurants about their ability to accommodate your organization's healthy catering requests (and if they can meet dietary needs/preferences). Be sure to also ask whether they will abide by healthy food preparation methods such as using low/no sodium ingredients, no MSG, no trans fats or no added sugar when requested.
- ⇒ Compile a list of caterers that accommodate. Highlight healthy menu items and beverages available from each caterer. Use the list in the "Planning the menu" section of this guide to inform your interview questions. Ask the caterers to discuss their ability to plan together for future needs (healthy options menu for meetings and events).

STEP 3

- ⇒ Make a list of preferred caterers from those that were interviewed. Ensure they are aware of the dietary restrictions or preference shared by attendees (from Step 2). If the menu offerings don't contain healthy options, request changes based on practical tips outlined below.

STEP 4

- ⇒ Compile information from the preferred caterers so that you are able to share the information with other stakeholders (those who order food for meetings and/or events) within your organization. The caterer may be able to do all of this for you, including providing nutritional information. Employees have a growing interest in this information for their own use (e.g., online trackers).

Compile a listing of:

- Healthy menu options and document what types of meals, snacks, beverages, etc., each caterer offers
- The deadlines for ordering
- What foods/beverages could be provided with last minute requests

Placing an order

STEP 1

⇒ Identify any dietary restrictions or preferences shared by anticipated attendees.

STEP 2

⇒ Work with the caterer to plan the menu (from the list of healthy options that has been compiled through the research).

⇒ Provide the list of employee dietary requests to your caterer and make a list of those who are:

- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Gluten-free
- Dairy-free
- Specific food allergies or intolerances: List_____

STEP 3

⇒ Plan the menu.

- Aim to include a minimum of one fruit at all breakfasts, lunches, dinners and breaks/snacks, and a minimum of one non-fried vegetable at lunches, dinners and breaks/snacks.
- Ensure each meal or snack contains fruit with no sugar added and non-fried vegetables.
- Ask for grains to be whole grains.
- Limit meat to lean choices and no more than 3-4 ounce portions.
- Ask for non-fat or low-fat milk, cheese and yogurt.
- Ask for all dressings, sauces and spreads to be served on the side. Consider healthier choices such as hummus, avocado, salsa, mustard or an oil- and vinegar-based dressing.
- Make beverages calorie-free.

Use the ideas below for planning your menu

Beverages

- Plain ice water
- Flavored or sweetened water with 100% fruit juice and limited to 12 ounces or less
- Skim or 1% milk
- Coffee or flavored coffees (regular or decaf)
- Tea (regular or herb and hot or cold)
- Coffee/tea creamers or skim milk, 1% milk or fat-free half & half

Breakfast

- Fresh fruit
- 100% fruit juices
- Whole grain bread, English muffins, muffins (small/mini), bagels (3 ½" or less) or tortillas
- Whole grain cereals (with > 5 grams fiber) with skim or 1% milk
- No or low-fat yogurt, plain or fruit-flavored (< 150 calories/6 ounces)
- Hard boiled eggs
- Nuts or seeds to top cereals or yogurt
- Smoothies with fresh or frozen (no sugar added) fruit and no or low-fat yogurt
- Condiments: natural peanut butter and 100% fruit spreads

Salads

- No or low-fat dressings served on the side
- Low-fat cheeses
- Skip bacon bits, bacon, fried meats or high fat cheeses

Sandwiches/wraps

- Whole grain bread or tortilla
- Mustard, hummus or other spreads served on the side
- Lean meats (3-4 ounces)
- No or low-fat cheese
- Veggies such as lettuce, tomato, cucumber, onion or peppers
- Avoid fried meats, heavy spreads, butter or margarine

Pizza

- Half the cheese on pizza
- Whole grain and/or thin crust
- Load with veggies
- Meat: non-fried chicken or Canadian bacon
- Cut pizza slices smaller
- Serve with a salad (see above) and a choice of fruit

Lunch/Dinner

- Ensure half the plate, box or meal is fruit (no sugar added) and non-fried vegetables
- Avoid fried foods
- Ask for grains to be whole grains (e.g., brown rice, quinoa, whole wheat couscous, whole wheat pasta or whole grain bread)
- No or low-fat dairy products
- Limit meat to lean meats no more than 3-4 ounces
- Broth-based soups
- Baked chips

Snacks

- Fresh fruit
- Cut-up veggies with hummus, or no or low-fat dip
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa
- Low-fat popcorn
- Whole grain crackers with low-fat cheese
- Unsalted and unsweetened nuts or seeds

Dessert

- Assess whether you need to offer dessert
- Offer fruit-based desserts, such as fresh fruit, fruit crumbles and baked fruit
- Serve bite-sized desserts or cut cakes, brownies, pies, etc., in smaller pieces

Food Preparation

- Select items that are broiled, baked, grilled or steamed rather than fried or sautéed
- Choose tomato-based sauces versus cream, butter or cheese sauces
- Skip butter, margarine or added oil on bread and rolls
- Use low sodium
- Do not use monosodium glutamate (MSG)

At the meeting or event

Research suggests that people don't actually know how much they want to eat prior to a meal/snack and don't know when to stop eating. The reality is that employees listen more to external cues (the food is gone) to tell them when they are full than internal cues such as satiety. Therefore, it's important to not only plan healthy meals and snacks, but to also consider where and how the food and drinks will be consumed.

Consider the following when you're planning your next meeting or event

- ⇒ Set up a relaxed dining environment. Employees will eat less with dimmer lighting and slower music.
- ⇒ Eliminate distractions when eating. Employees will eat more if they're required to focus their attention on something else while they're eating.
- ⇒ Label food as a small snack. Employees tend to eat less when they perceive the eating occasion to be a snack versus a meal.
- ⇒ Set up a buffet to nudge people to eat less.
 - Provide smaller plates and bowls.
 - Offer tall, narrow glasses instead of short, wide glasses.
 - Downsize serving bowls, plates and utensils.
 - Offer fewer choices of foods and beverages types.
 - Move the healthier items like fruits and vegetables within reach.
- ⇒ Get feedback from employees on the menu(s) served after each event, quarterly or annually. What foods and beverages would they like to see offered at future meetings and events? Ask employees their opinions on the taste, appearance and acceptability of the healthy foods offered. Use the questions below as a guide to continue monitoring how employees feel about the choices being offered.
 1. Have you seen an increase in healthy food choices (i.e., fruits and vegetables) being served at company meetings and events? Yes No Don't Know
 2. Does the access to more fruits and vegetables at meetings and events make it easier for you to consume more healthy choices? Yes No Don't Know
 3. Do you enjoy the taste of the healthy foods being offered? Yes No Don't Know
 4. Please provide suggestions of other foods or beverages to consider offering at future meetings and events: _____