

CREATING A HEALTHY SNACK STATION

Making healthy food choices easy for employees



Do your employees regularly leave the office to get food? Has your wellness committee run into issues with adding healthier foods to vending machines? Do you want your employees to feel productive and have the energy they need to get through the day? If yes, consider creating a healthy snack station at your organization.

Why a healthy snack station?

Americans are eating more foods outside the home. Unfortunately, eating away from home can lead to larger portions and additional unnecessary ingredients with more fat, sodium, sugar, etc. It can also be tougher to order and buy fruits and vegetables and foods with whole grains and fiber.

Employees are more likely to make better food decisions when the surrounding environment supports their healthy efforts. It's much more difficult for an employee to choose a healthy snack when there are sweets or other less healthy options in work spaces. One study found that fruit, vegetable and fat intake was positively influenced by strategies in the work environment. This means it makes sense to have *more* better choices available, *identify* and *promote* them and give them a better *price*.¹

Providing healthy snacks through a healthy snack station can help your employees:

- 1) Increase fruit, vegetable and whole grain intake
- 2) Eat calorie-controlled portions
- 3) Eat snacks that will make them feel more alert, be more productive and have more energy
- 4) Save time by not having to plan and pack snacks from home or leave work to find a healthy snack
- 5) Save money by not having to purchase snacks at convenience stores, restaurants or from other outside establishments

1. Glanz et al. Increasing fruit, vegetable and fat intake by changing environments, policy and pricing: a restaurant-based research, strategies and recommendation. *Preventive Medicine*. 2004; 39: S88-S99.

Steps to set up a healthy snack station

1. Survey employees

Seek valuable feedback from your employees to make your snack station successful. You can do this through focus groups of 10-12 employees, informational interviews or a simple e-mail survey. Ask employees if they would purchase a snack from a healthy snack station, how far they'd go to make the purchase (same department, same floor, in the building, etc.), what they'd pay for a healthy snack and what types of snacks they'd like to have available to purchase (Use the list of foods on the next page!).

2. Determine station location and food/beverage storage needs

From your survey results, determine the location(s) for your healthy snack station(s) and storage needs. Consider the following:

- *Cold refrigeration:* Will you use an existing refrigerator or will you need to purchase cold storage? Many organizations have purchased a dorm-size refrigerator (with glass doors so that employees can see the available snacks). If your budget is limited, you may also want to start with snacks that don't require refrigeration.
- *Dry storage:* Remember appeal is one reason a person will make a purchase and make it again. Snacks must be displayed nicely to look appealing. Consider baskets for fruit and small containers for individual servings of trail mix, nuts or seeds and packets of peanut butter.
- *Other storage needs:* You may decide it is more cost effective to purchase larger bags and packages of snacks and then divide them into individual serving size portions. If you decide to do this, you will need to consider how to package the individual servings (for example, zipped baggies) and storage needs for larger packages, boxes and containers (for example, plastic bins).

3. Select foods and beverages for your station

Based on employee survey results, determine how much food and how many beverages you will purchase. Remember these items may change based upon what employees are choosing, seasonal availability of foods and special promotions you may run.

Ideas for healthy foods and beverages

Refrigerated/fresh items:

- Individual containers of hummus and low-fat dips
- Individual containers of salsa
- Low-fat cheese sticks and cheese rounds
- Hard boiled eggs
- Individual containers of low-fat yogurt and cottage cheese
- Individual baggies of carrots, celery, peppers, cucumbers, broccoli and cauliflower
- Apples, bananas, pears, kiwi, clementine's, oranges and other in-season fresh fruit
- Pre-portioned grapes
- Plain and naturally-flavored waters (no artificial ingredients or additives)
- Unsweetened hot and cold tea
- Skim, low-fat milk and nut milks (almond, rice, soy, etc.)
- 100% juices (4-6 ounce servings)
- 100% vegetable juices

Dry items:

- Instant oatmeal – unflavored/plain [If desired, offer individual portions of brown sugar, nuts and dried fruit for topping]
- Cereal, with a whole grain as the first ingredient, ≤ 8 grams sugar and ≥ 3 grams fiber per serving
- Energy bars with ≤ 200 calories, ≥ 5 grams protein, ≥ 3 grams fiber, ≤ 18 grams sugar and made with whole grains and no trans fat
- Canned soup that is broth-based, reduced sodium or low sodium, with ≥ 3 grams fiber and less than 480 mg sodium per 1 cup serving
- Individual portions of whole grain crackers, popcorn, whole-grain chips, baked tortilla chips
- Unsweetened single-serving applesauce
- Individual packages of natural peanut butter (no hydrogenated oil, added oil and sugar)
- Individual boxes of raisins
- Individual single-serving baggies of nuts, seeds, dried fruit and trail mix

Other items:

- Napkins
- Forks, knives and spoons
- Small paper plates
- Cups and bowls (hot/cold)

4. Create food display and presentation

It's important to make the snacks look appealing. Consider how they will be displayed. Research suggests that fruit sells better displayed prominently in a pretty bowl or basket. Consider the types of baskets, containers or cloth napkins you may need to create a durable, sustainable display area. Remember to include these items in your financial plans.

5. Outline healthy snack station management procedures

Consider how your snack station will be stocked, managed and maintained.

- Who will be in charge of managing the snack/beverage inventory? This will include managing expiration dates on snacks and tossing perishable foods.
- Who will be responsible for ordering/purchasing the food and drinks?
- How often will the station be restocked?
- Who will manage the budget?
- Who will determine which snacks and beverages to purchase? How often will these snack options be reviewed?
- Who will track snack and beverage sales?

6. Determine budget and set prices

You will need a budget to get the snack station started. However, most organizations have found that snack stations are a cost neutral investment after the initial investment.

Determine whether your organization will subsidize the costs of the snacks or ask your employees to pay for the snacks. Take food waste as well as utensils, dishes or baggies that may be needed for the snacks into account when setting prices. There is a chance that a banana will not sell or a yogurt may expire before it's purchased. Set prices to account for this. Many companies find that setting prices \$.25-\$.50 over actual food costs easily covers food waste and is still a reasonable price for employees. Keeping snack costs lower than other purchased foods is a good incentive for employees to choose the healthier snacks over other options.

Create a sign that lists food and beverage prices. Have a payment box or basket available. Allow employees to pay for snacks on their honor. A few employers have expressed concerns of food theft and financial loss with this type of on-your-honor payment system. However, most employers find that their employees are so grateful for the snack station that they pay for the snacks and many times pay more than the actual price to ensure the station is sustainable. For example, one employer provided this feedback:

"We had a concern about the healthy snack station being 'on your honor'. However, we have found our employees do not take change for some items. For example, an item that was 40 cents was paid for with two quarters. Our healthy snack station has taken in more money than the advertised cost.

Plus, we have received so many positive comments from employees. The healthy snack station concept is certainly a plus for employees and our organization."

7. Write a promotional plan

Determine how you will promote your snack station to employees. Consider internal communication strategies such as the Intranet, e-mail, internal newsletters, posters, flyers, etc. to promote the snack station. Create appealing signage for the snack station to promote items.

Featuring a specific snack and its health benefits can be a successful strategy for getting employees to try a new snack. For example:

"Almonds, with 4 grams of fiber per ounce, have the highest fiber content of any nut. Almonds also have been shown to lower the risk of diabetes and heart disease. Try a serving of almonds today for a healthy snack to keep you full and satisfied until your next meal! They're just \$.50 a bag at the employee snack station."

8. Re-evaluate your snack station annually

It's important to have a plan to annually measure the success of your snack station. Consider re-surveying your employees to determine if they've used the snack station (why or why not), what they've purchased, their ideas for new snack items and their opinion of the cost of the items.

Use this information to continually improve your snack station to meet the needs of your employees. Keeping your employees involved in the process will ensure your snack station is a success. Outline challenges of maintaining the station. Pull together a working group to help problem-solve your challenges.

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