



American
Heart
Association®

HEALTHY FOOD & BEVERAGE TOOLKIT





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Introduction

Our Mission Statement

To be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives

Our 2024 Goal

We believe every person deserves the opportunity for a full, healthy life. As champions for health equity, by 2024, the American Heart Association will advance cardiovascular health for all, including identifying and removing barriers to health care access and quality.



Background

According to the 2017-2018 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, less than 10 percent of U.S. adults meet the daily recommendations for whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Making healthy changes in the workplace — where many adults spend much of their day — is an important way to encourage people to choose nutritious foods. It also helps cultivate social norms that foster healthier choices and behaviors.

Through our science-based knowledge, the American Heart Association empowers people, communities and organizations to build a sustainable culture of health and well-being. To support our health impact goal that all Americans have a long, healthy life and improve their cardiovascular health, the American Heart Association encourages organizations to create a healthy environment and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Together, we can create an environment where the healthy choice is delicious, appealing and affordable.

To support meaningful and sustainable changes, we've followed two important guiding principles in creating this toolkit: 1) to meet people where they are and 2) to consider the environments where they work and live. This toolkit is designed for anyone involved with purchasing foods and beverages, from the office vending machine to an off-site special event involving catering for an organization. Our goal is to provide practical, actionable suggestions that are easy to understand and apply. You can modify our guidance to fit the specific needs of your organization.

The goal is to empower people to adopt a heart-healthy eating pattern that works for them. The food and beverage guidance in this toolkit cultivates an environment that encourages heart-healthy eating patterns by ensuring people have easy access to healthy, appealing and culturally relevant foods and beverages. People with special dietary needs should also be accommodated.





Getting Started

Improving the health of your organization may seem daunting but if you start with small steps and attainable goals, you can achieve a healthy food environment in your organization.

Implementing Guidance

- Get leadership approval and engagement.
- Work with staff from internal departments including human resources, facilities, operations, meetings and other relevant departments. Review sections of the toolkit most relevant to each group. Engage a diverse group of staff and members to the plan development.
- Consult with external partners including food and beverage vendors, a registered dietitian, unions, your insurance provider and employee health specialists.
- Assess your current food environment, policies and vendor contracts.
- Create an action plan and timeline. Determine which changes can be made immediately and which will be made in the future.
- Draft policies (if applicable).
- Work with vendors and staff to implement changes.

- Communicate changes and new policies to employees/members. ([See sample email](#))
- Monitor, evaluate and communicate results, adjusting as needed.

The information on the following pages of this Toolkit is intended to empower you to provide healthier foods and beverages in your organization — which is one component of creating a culture of health and well-being. It does not guarantee specific nutritional levels or health outcomes. Following or implementing this guidance does not constitute compliance with any specific American Heart Association program requirements.



Creating a Culture of Health

- Lead by example. When organizational leaders model healthy eating and other healthy behaviors, it makes a powerful statement.
 - Provide education and resources about healthy living and eating to your employees/members.
 - Offer physical activity opportunities as appropriate and encourage employees to achieve at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
 - Provide a tobacco-free environment and access to tobacco cessation resources.
 - Prioritize sustainable practices when possible to minimize waste and offer more plant-based options.
 - Identify and use vendors who provide healthier foods and beverages.
 - Recognize employees and departments that step up as leaders in promoting healthier choices.
 - Share your commitment with other leaders in your community. Challenge them to lead by example, too.
 - Select healthier foods when you dine with colleagues, guests and employees.
 - Create a set of recommendations for **office foods** and communicate it — and the reasons why — to employees.
- 
- Sign the **Healthy Food and Beverage Pledge** or create your own organization's commitment and post it prominently in a common area where employees and visitors can see it and/or share through digital communication channels.
 - Communicate to staff and guests that you care about their health and well-being. Send an **email** or letter explaining how you plan to provide healthier food and beverages in the organization.
 - Create a **food and beverage policy** to further demonstrate your organization's commitment to a healthier environment.

Office Food Recommendations

- Limit the amount of time employees can help themselves to food in a common area if it's available. For example, it might be available 8:30-10:30 a.m. for breakfast items or 11 a.m.-1 p.m. for lunch or snacks. After that time, suggest the food be put away.
- Explore other ways to celebrate special occasions besides providing unhealthy foods. Some ideas include:
 - giving flowers to the honoree
 - providing fresh fruit or 100% fruit pops
 - holding a fun group activity off site
 - taking a walking break
- Celebrate team members' birthdays once a month instead of on each individual day.
- If there's a potluck or food sign-up list for a holiday or special occasion, encourage employees to include healthy options, such as a potluck build-your-own-salad bar with a variety of healthy fruits, veggies, toppings, dressings, etc.
- Minimize foods that tend to have high amounts of added sugars, sodium, saturated fat and calories.
- Replace sweets with easy pickup-and-go fresh fruit, such as apples, oranges, bananas or plums in common areas.



Sample Healthy Food and Beverage Pledge

_____ values the health of our employees and guests, and we want to create a culture of health and well-being. We commit that our organization will:

- Make healthy changes to vending machines, cafeterias, meetings, events and other sources of food and beverages.
- Identify and use vendors who provide healthier food and beverage choices in planning activities and events.
- Provide leadership support and modeling for our healthy food and beverage efforts.
- Educate employees and guests about healthy eating and promote healthier choices.
- Provide more fruits and vegetables.
- Provide more whole grains.
- Provide reasonable portion sizes. (The recommended portion of any food or beverage depends on whether it's calorie-packed or not.)
- Provide water and unsweetened tea and coffee to reduce sugary beverage consumption.
- Reduce sodium, added sugars and saturated fat in our foods and beverages.

Signature(s)

Printed Name(s)

Title(s)

Date

Commitment to a Healthy Workforce/Environment Email Template

TO: All Staff/Guests/Members

FROM: [CEO OR OTHER SENIOR LEADER]

SUBJECT: Our Commitment to a Healthy Workforce or Environment

We value the health of our employees and guests and want to provide an environment in which everyone can thrive. We're committed to fostering a culture of health in our organization where healthy choices are easier. In the coming [WEEKS/MONTHS], we'll be making changes to foods and beverages offered in vending machines, cafeterias, meetings and events.

With the guidance of the American Heart Association, we've committed to several ambitious goals, including:

- Reducing sugary beverages.
- Reducing sodium, added sugars and saturated fat in the food and beverages provided.
- Providing more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and unsweetened beverages.
- Providing reasonable portion sizes. The recommended portion of any food or beverage depends on whether it's calorie-packed or not.
- Identifying and using food vendors who offer healthier choices.

Making these changes will take time and cooperation. Our aim is to create a healthier environment that gives employees and guests ample food and beverage choices that are enjoyable and health-promoting. We value your support and feedback during this transition process.



Healthy Food and Beverage Policy Guidance

- The organization has a written policy and internal communications that supports the availability of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while reducing sodium, added sugars and saturated fat in the foods and beverages provided.
- The organization shall offer at least 50% healthy beverage choices throughout the organization including cafeterias, catered meetings, break rooms, snack bars and vending machines with a plan to eliminate sugary beverages.
- The organization shall offer 25% of healthier food options available in cafeterias, catered meetings, break rooms, snack bars and vending machines with a plan to annually improve this percentage.
- The organization shall offer catered meals in cafeterias, on- or off-site meetings that align with the recommendations within this toolkit.
- The organization shall post nutritional information and menu labeling on sodium, calories, and added sugars for foods and beverages sold in cafeterias, snack bars, vending machines, catered meals or other purchase points.
- Consideration should be given to promote healthy products. Pricing of healthy items should be comparable if not favorable to less healthy items. Price should not be a deterrent to healthy foods. Placement of healthier items should be at or near eye-level and easy for the customer to see. The organization shall implement components of healthy design in the facility including adequate kitchen space that allows for the safe and hygienic preparation of meals onsite, if applicable.





American Heart Association's Dietary Guidance

Healthy Eating Recommendations

- Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.
- Include fiber-rich whole grains.
- Select healthy sources of protein with a focus on mostly plants such as legumes, nuts and seeds. Other options are:
 - Choose lean and extra-lean cuts of meat. (“Choice” or “select” grades of beef are better choices than “prime.” Cuts labeled “loin” and “round” are the healthier selections for meat and pork. Ground beef should be at least 95% lean.)
 - Choose skinless poultry, including ground turkey or chicken.
 - Eat fish (preferably those high in omega-3 fatty acids) or seafood.
 - Select low fat (1%) or fat-free dairy products.
 - Include healthy unsaturated fats, such as avocados and liquid non-tropical vegetable oils such as olive, corn or canola.
- Limit processed food, including meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.
- Limit foods with added sugars and sugary drinks.
- Limit saturated fats and minimize trans fats.
- Prepare foods with little or no salt and choose foods with less sodium.
- Limit or preferably consume no alcohol.



Nutrition Standards

Beverages

- Water (plain, sparkling and flavored): no more than 10 calories per serving
- Milk and unsweetened milk alternatives (soy, almond, etc.): fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk; no more than 130 calories per 8 fl. oz.
- Juice: 100% fruit or vegetable juice (or juice and water)
 - No added sugars/sweeteners (except nonnutritive sweeteners)
 - No more than 120 calories per 8 fl. oz. (preferred serving size)
 - For vegetable juice: choose the lowest sodium option; no more than 360 mg per label serving
- Other: no more than 10 calories per serving

Snacks (Except Plain Nuts and Nut/Fruit Mixes)

- No more than 200 calories per label serving
- Choose items with the lowest amount of sodium; no more than 240 mg of sodium per label serving (preferably no more than 140 mg)
- No more than 0 g trans fat per label serving
- No products containing partially hydrogenated oils; partially hydrogenated vegetable oils aren't permitted in products in the United States, but may be present in products produced outside the U.S.
- No more than 1 g of saturated fat per label serving
- For plain nuts and nut/fruit mixes only:
 - Preferred serving size for plain nuts is 1 oz. but no more than 1.5 oz.
 - Choose products with the lowest amount of sodium; no more than 140 mg of sodium per label serving

Meals

- No more than 700 calories
- No more than 800 mg sodium (preferably no more than 525 mg)
- No more than 5 g saturated fat
- No more than 105 mg cholesterol
- Less than 0.5 g trans fat
- Do not use products containing partially hydrogenated oils
- At least 1 serving (1/2 to 1 cup total) of vegetables and/or fruits

Entrees

- One serving (cooked):
 - Meat = 3 oz.
 - Deli meat = 3 oz; preferably 2 oz.
 - Fish = 3 oz.
 - Poultry = 3 oz.

Other

- Yogurt (6-oz. serving): no more than 20 g total sugars
- Frozen plain vegetables: no more than 140 mg sodium per label serving
- Canned vegetables (except tomato-based): no more than 240 mg per label serving
- Canned tomatoes and tomato-based products: no more than 360 mg sodium per label serving
- Bread/Grain-Based Products (including snack bars): should be a good source of dietary fiber (10–19% DV) or excellent source (> 20% DV); if good source, no more than 7 g total sugars per serving; if excellent source, no more than 9 g total sugars per serving

Desserts

- No more than 200 calories per serving

Nutrition standards are provided as a benchmark if your foodvendor makes nutrition information available. Providers will often supply nutrition information and continue to request so they will know it is important to your organization.



Meal Planning

These step-by-step action plans will help you plan healthier meals and snacks for your employees, members and guests in your organization. Keep in mind this guidance is provided to complement existing event planning practices and focused on improving the healthfulness of event menus.

On-Site Meetings and Events

1. Identify vendors/food providers (caterers, restaurants, grocery stores) in your area who are possible options for in-house catering.
 2. Set up a 15-minute informational interview. Explain your organization is committed to creating a culture of health and that you want to learn about their healthier menu options. The following questions will help you identify who is willing to work with you in providing healthier meals.
 - Do you offer healthier items on your menu?
 - What are your healthier menu offerings?
 - Have any other companies requested healthier foods? If so, how is that going — the good and the bad (if any)?
 - Can you accommodate special requests?
 - Can you provide calorie, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium values for your menu/food offerings? Some food providers may not supply nutrition standards but continue to request it so they know this information is needed. Continuing requests will motivate vendors to provide the information in a timely manner.
 3. Select the vendor(s) you think can best meet your needs.
 4. Plan an in-person or virtual meeting with the primary contact for each potential vendor. Allow 1 to 1½ hours for each meeting. Discussion items should include:
 - Review the information in this toolkit, especially the **Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards**.
- You may want to send your contact(s) the information in advance so they can suggest possible menu offerings before your meeting.
- Identify the menu offerings that may be acceptable and discuss ingredients, possible substitutions, etc. For example, ask if they'll substitute a fresh fruit cup for chips.
 - Ask the vendor if they can do a taste testing for a small group from your organization. Include three to five people so you get a few opinions on the acceptability of the food. It's important for the food to taste good. People may say that a particular food item doesn't taste exactly as it used to, and that's OK. It may take a little time for some people's taste buds to adjust to healthier food.
5. Share the vendor's contact information and list of acceptable menu items with other staff responsible for planning and ordering meals for meetings and events.
 6. Order less than you think you need, especially for items in bulk trays rather than individual portions.
 7. Document and share your experiences (with the vendor and other staff) when possible.
 8. Check in with your contacts periodically to see if new or seasonal menu items are being offered.
 9. If a food vendor is not meeting your needs, explore other vendor options.

When planning plated meals, buffets or meeting breaks outside of your office, such at hotels, restaurants and conference centers, follow these steps to help make healthier choices.

Off-Site Meetings and Events

1. Request the site's catering menus well in advance of the meeting or event to allow enough time for customization and changes to their existing offerings.
2. Review the catering options against the **Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards** to determine which meals/food will be acceptable.
3. Let the catering manager and/or chef know you want to work together to create healthier meals. Request a meeting date and time to discuss options.
4. Share the following guidelines and suggestions for healthy offerings as well as the **Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards** in advance of the meeting.
 - Can they provide the calorie, saturated fat, added sugar and sodium values for your menu/food offerings to help choose the healthier options?
 - Are they willing to create dishes that aren't on the menu if they have some guidance and enough lead time?
 - If proximity and time allow, ask the caterer if they can do a taste testing for a small group from your organization. Include three to five people so you get a few opinions on the acceptability of the food. It's important for the food to taste good. People may say that a particular food item doesn't taste exactly as it used to, and that's okay. It may take a little time for some people's taste buds to adjust to healthier food.
5. Depending on the site's location, plan an in-person or virtual meeting with the primary contact. Allow 1 to 1½ hours for the meeting. Discussion items/questions should include:
 - Identify the menu offerings that may be acceptable and discuss ingredients, possible substitutions, etc. For example, ask if they'll substitute a fresh fruit for chips.





Meal Categories

The following are some specific suggestions for healthy offerings for on-site and off-site meetings and events. Be sure to share this information along with the [Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards](#) for nutrition details and serving sizes with your caterers and vendors.

Appetizers

When serving appetizers, offer fruit, vegetables, whole grains and/or legumes (beans, peas, lentils). Healthy suggestions include:

- Fresh vegetables with fat-free/low-fat dressing, salsa (such as papaya or tomatillo), yogurt or tofu dip
- Roasted/grilled vegetables, such as squash, eggplant, bell and chile peppers, pineapple and watermelon
- Fresh fruits (grapes, melon, mango, berries)
- Nuts (unsalted or very lightly salted and unsweetened) such as almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts
- Grilled or broiled chicken tenders without skin
- Miniature meatballs made with lean ground meat or poultry, possibly blended with mushrooms
- Skewers or kabobs with lean meat or poultry and vegetables
- Broiled, grilled, roasted or poached seafood
- Boiled shrimp with cocktail sauce or ceviche
- Vegetable spring or summer rolls (fresh, not fried)
- Taquitos or quesadillas (baked, not fried)
- Small cubes of cheese (no more than ¾" square), such as part-skim mozzarella or Swiss, paired with berries or grapes and whole-grain crackers or bread
- Hummus, such as black bean or black-eyed pea, with whole-grain crackers and raw vegetables
- Caprese salad (tomato, part-skim mozzarella and basil)
- Mexican street corn (elote) dip made with fat-free/low-fat mayo and sour cream served with baked corn tortilla chips
- Guacamole with baked plantain chips, baby carrots, celery sticks and jicama slices

- Flatbreads, bruschettas or tostadas (toppings may include tomato, other veggies, beans, herbs such as basil or cilantro, part-skim mozzarella, Cotija cheese or queso fresco)
- Stuffed mushroom caps, jalapeños or okra (stuffed with roasted vegetables instead of cheese or meat)
- Green tomatoes (baked, not fried) with hot sauce

Snacks

If you choose to provide snacks at meeting breaks, offer healthier options such as:

- Fresh fruit, such as apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, grapes, melon, oranges and pineapple
- Fruit tray or fruit kabobs
- Applesauce (unsweetened)
- Dried fruits (unsweetened preferably), such as apples, apricots, blueberries, cranberries, papaya and raisins
- Fresh vegetables, such as bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cherry tomatoes, edamame, snap peas and zucchini
- Whole-grain crackers
- Baked whole-grain pita chips
- Dips, such as hummus, salsa and guacamole
- Roasted or raw nuts (unsalted or very lightly salted), such as almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts (serve on the side since some people have nut allergies)
- "Build Your Own Trail Mix Bar" that could include dried fruit (unsweetened preferably), nuts, seeds (pumpkin, sunflower) and whole-grain cereal
- Yogurt (fat-free or low-fat)
- Yogurt parfaits with fruit and/or unsalted nuts for toppings

- Light popcorn (unsalted or lightly salted)
- Baked multigrain or corn tortilla chips
- Rice cakes (whole-grain and/or brown rice)
- Graham crackers (whole grain preferably)
- Whole-wheat bagels mini size or cut into quarters; serve with fat-free or low-fat cream cheese
- Cheese (fat-free/low-fat/light) in small portions

Meals

A meal is a combination of foods and beverages for breakfast, lunch or dinner. It includes items from two or more recommended food groups served in combination, such as lean meat + vegetable + fruit + whole-grain bread). At least one item should be a fruit or vegetable. Food groups include grains (whole grain bread, cereal, rice and pasta); fruits; vegetables; dairy (low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.); and protein (beans, peas, lentils, nuts, fish/seafood, poultry, meat and eggs). The following is general guidance on preparing healthy meals.

Ensure healthier options are appealing in name and appearance.

- On buffets, place healthier options in prominent positions at the start of the line, where they're more likely to be seen and chosen. Use smaller plates so attendees get up from the table and move around more often.
- Provide reasonable (not large) portions of foods and beverages. Cut large portions in halves or quarters when, possible, such as bagels and sandwiches.
- Prepare foods with minimal salt, if needed. Instead use herbs, spices, salt-free seasoning blends, flavored vinegars, peppers, garlic and citrus juice/zest to add flavor.
- Offer at least one fruit and/or vegetable serving with a meal. Aim for filling half the plate with vegetables and fruits.
- If multiple entrées are offered (such as on a buffet), include vegetarian and fish options.

- Ask attendees in advance about special dietary preferences or restrictions, such as vegetarian/vegan and food allergies, so you can plan accordingly.
- Drain and rinse canned meat, seafood, vegetables and beans to remove excess salt or oil.
- Use **healthy cooking methods** to prepare foods. Limit fried foods.
- Use healthy non-tropical vegetable oils, such as canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, sesame, soybean and sunflower, to cook foods.
- Avoid foods cooked with butter, lard and shortening. Replace with these saturated fats with healthier fats including non-tropical vegetable oils.
- Do not use products with partially hydrogenated oils or trans fat.
- Trim all visible fats on meats and poultry before cooking.
- If poultry skin was left on to cook (for a roasted whole chicken, for example), discard the skin before serving



Beverages

Many beverage choices are available, with varying calorie and sugar content. Beverages marketed with words such as vitamin, natural, power, energy, etc. can contain just as much sugar and calories as a regular soda. Compare nutrition information and choose wisely. You may need to use a gradual approach to minimize sugary beverages.

- Ensure that fresh cool drinking water is always available at no cost.
- Garnish pitchers of water with citrus or cucumber slices or provide citrus wedges in a bowl to make water a more attractive and appealing option.
- Offer sparkling water.
- Offer unsweetened coffee and tea, including decaffeinated options.
- Provide fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk or unsweetened milk alternatives for cold cereal and as a beverage as well as nondairy creamer alternatives (soy or oat milk) instead of half and half or whole milk for coffee and tea.
- Offer 100% fruit juices, especially those that provide more beneficial nutrients, such as orange and grapefruit, in small glasses.
- Provide a selection of teas, including herbal and decaf.
- Limit sugary beverage options.

Continental Breakfast

Baked Goods

- Limit baked goods, including biscuits, corn bread, croissants, Danishes, muffins and pastries.

Breads

- If serving, offer whole-grain options, such as toast or bagels that can be cut into halves or quarters.
- Serve nut butters on the side along with assorted jams (or preserves) in place of butter

Cereals

- Offer assorted cold whole-grain cereals (limiting total sugar to more than 9 grams per serving) and plain oatmeal.
- Include toppings on the side, such as dried fruit (unsweetened preferably), unsalted nuts (almonds, pecans, walnuts) and spices (cinnamon, nutmeg).

Fruit

- Choose portable fruits in their own skins, such as bananas, apples and pears.
- Offer small cups of cut-up fruit and berries

Yogurt

- Provide fat-free or low-fat assorted flavors (with no more than 20 g total sugars per 6-ounce serving) and plain.
- Include toppings on the side, such as dried fruit (unsweetened preferably), unsalted nuts (almonds, pecans, walnuts) and spices (cinnamon, nutmeg).

Lunch and Dinner

Salads

- If planning a buffet, consider a "Build Your Own Salad Station" with a variety of toppings.
- Offer a side salad with entrées.
- If a salad is going to be served as the entrée (versus a side salad), be sure the appropriate amount of food is provided.
- Choose salads with nutritious ingredients, such as a variety of greens, dried fruit (unsweetened preferably), fresh fruit, avocado, nuts, seeds, red and yellow peppers, beans, peas and whole grains such as corn, quinoa or bulgur.
- If using cheese, offer in a small quantity, preferably as a garnish on a plated salad. Limit serving cheese on a buffet.
- Limit high-sodium ingredients, such as croutons, capers, olives, bacon bits and anchovies

- Limit processed meats, such as those preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.

Salad Dressings

- Offer vinaigrette-type dressings. They are typically a healthier choice and come in many flavors, such as balsamic, pomegranate, orange, red wine, cider, and lemon.
- Always include a healthy oil, such as canola, corn or olive, and vinegar as an option.
- For other options, use low-fat options, such as Italian or French.
- Limit heavy, creamy dressings.
- Serve all dressings on the side.

Sandwiches

- Choose ingredients with the lowest amounts of sodium, added sugars and saturated fat and no trans fat.
- Cut large sandwiches in halves or quarters before serving.
- Offer fiber-rich, whole-grain breads. If serving on flat bread, pita, tortilla or wrap, use smaller sizes and whole grain.
- Limit fatty meats and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives including added nitrates/nitrites. Because processed deli meats can be high in sodium, check nutrition information if available and use varieties with the lowest amounts of sodium.
- Add vegetables and/or fruits to make a sandwich healthier, tastier and more filling.
- Limit cheese because it's usually high in sodium and saturated fat. Swiss and mozzarella are usually healthier choices. If offering, use thin slices.
- Use avocado or hummus in place of cheese for vegan sandwiches.
- Offer fruit or vegetables on the side in place of chips.

Soups

- Choose the lowest sodium options for commercial soups.
- Offer soups from scratch that include vegetables, whole grains, beans, and/or legumes as well as use low-sodium broth.
- Limit cream-based soups that use heavy cream or whole milk.

Entrées

- If offering more than one entrée, offer a vegetarian option (plant-based proteins include beans, hummus, nut butters, tahini and tofu, and certain grains, such as quinoa, are also high in protein). Also, if possible, offer a fish selection. Preferably choose an oily fish, such as herring, mackerel, black cod, salmon, sardines, bluefin tuna, whitefish, and striped bass because they are rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
- Limit processed foods including meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites
- Sauces and gravies should be made without too much sodium and served on the side. Heavy sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients should be limited.

Vegetable/Fruit Side Dishes

- Provide at least one vegetable or fruit side to accompany an entrée. Options could include asparagus, spinach, carrots, broccoli, yellow squash, mushrooms, Brussels sprouts, peas, corn, green beans, sweet potatoes and potatoes, okra, collards or other greens.
- Choose a variety of colors and take advantage of seasonal veggies.
- Fresh, frozen and canned vegetables/fruits all can be healthy options. Make selections with the lowest amounts of sodium and added sugars.
- Frozen fruit should be 100% fruit with no added sugars

- Canned fruit should be packed in water, its own juice or light syrup. Avoid heavy syrups.
- Prepare food using healthier cooking techniques, such as roasted, grilled and steamed. **(See [Healthier Cooking Techniques for more options.](#))** Limit heavy preparations such as fried, creamed, casserole, au gratin, tempura and twice-baked (potatoes).
- Prepare and serve side dishes without butter or salt.
- Season vegetables with herbs, spices, salt-free seasonings, flavored vinegar or a squeeze of lemon or lime.
- Serve any accompanying sauce on the side.

Other Side Dishes

If offering another side dish, choose:

- Whole grains, such as quinoa, barley, bulgur and couscous
- Beans and legumes, such as black, pinto, kidney and lima beans; black-eyed peas; edamame and green peas
- Rice, such as black, brown, red, wild and mixed
- Whole-grain pasta with tomato-based sauce
- Condiments, Seasonings, Sauces and Gravies
- Offer condiments on the side on in individual packets. Traditional prepared condiments, including mustard, ketchup, mayo, can be high in sodium, added sugars and fats, so choose the best options.
- Healthier alternatives to condiment can include fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto and salsa. (Check Nutrition Facts panel, if available, to select the lowest in sodium.)
- Use herbs, spices and salt-free seasonings to add flavor.
- Limit sauces and gravies that contain a lot of sodium and whole milk, heavy cream, sour cream, cheese, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients.
- Italian/pasta dishes should be served with a tomato-based sauce.

Desserts

Desserts are not needed at most lunches, dinners and receptions and should only be served for special occasion events, such as galas. If a dessert is required, fresh fruit and fruit-based desserts are better choices. If you offer traditional desserts, choose options that can be served in a small vessel, such as a mini ramekin or shot glass. Always offer fruit as an alternative.

Below are some healthy suggestions:

- Baked apples
- Poached pears
- Grilled peaches
- Sauteed bananas
- Roasted plums
- Mini fruit tarts (no more than 2" diameter)
- Angel food cake with fresh fruit compote
- Fresh fruit medley (put in a martini glass with a sprig of mint for a fancier presentation)
- Fruit skewers
- Fruit sorbet (i.e., mango, peach)
- Dark chocolate-dipped strawberries
- Miniature desserts (small portions of a traditional dessert)
- Small squares of cake (no more than 2" square) paired with fresh fruit or berries





Making Healthy Choices in Vending Machines

Improving the nutritional quality of selections in vending machines is an important step toward creating a culture of health. Follow these steps to help create your organization's action plan.

1. Take a complete inventory of the current products in your vending machine(s).
2. Determine if the products are in alignment with the **Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards** and note changes needed.
3. Contact your vendor.
 - Determine your current contract specifics (products, signage, restrictions and so on).
 - Ask about healthy product options and new products.
 - Provide a list of ideas/product requests to check availability and pricing. Healthy options could include:
 - Baked chips
 - Pretzels
 - Dried fruit (unsweetened)
 - Applesauce (unsweetened)
 - Canned fruit (in juice or light syrup only)
 - Nuts (limit to 1– 1.5 ounces)
 - Trail mix (nuts, fruit and seeds only)
 - Whole-grain crackers
 - Whole-grain pita chips
 - Light popcorn
 - Oatmeal
 - Graham crackers (whole grain, if possible)
 - Request nutrition information as needed.
 - Provide them with the **Healthy Eating Recommendations and Nutrition Standards**.
 - Discuss transition timeline.
4. Involve employees.
 - Identify employees to be involved in the planning process and engage people at all levels in your organization.
 - Survey employees for feedback about what types of healthy items they'd like offered.
 - Send out an email and/or post signs informing employees of the new, healthy options coming soon.
5. Replace the unhealthy items with healthier choices all at once or a transitional approach.
 - Select the smallest package sizes offered by your vendor.
 - Offer sugar-free mints and gum.
 - Consider baked snack chips or pretzels.
 - Reduce snack desserts high in sugar and calories and sweet-baked items, including but not limited to: cakes, cupcakes, cream-filled cakes, coffee cakes, cookies, donuts, muffins, sweet rolls and toaster pastries.
 - Reduce sugary beverages. At least 50% of the beverages available should be water, 100% juice, milk and milk alternatives, coffee, tea and other acceptable beverages. Create plan to transition to ultimately 100% of beverages being healthy options.
6. Evaluate and communicate results.
 - Usage reports from your vendor can show the popularity and acceptance of new items.

Additional Recommendations

- Post calorie, sodium and added sugar content for all items (from the Nutrition Facts label) on or near the machine so people can compare before they purchase.
- Healthier items should be priced competitively or discounted, if possible.
- Healthier items should be prominently placed at eye level or in the most visible location.
- Advertising/promotional signage or space on machines should only promote healthier items.
- You may need to take a gradual approach to implementing healthy changes. Start with small, easy steps and progress to more challenging ones over time as your employees/guests adapt to the new culture of health.



Appendices

Resources

American Heart Association

Leadership Resources

Diet and Lifestyle Recommendations

2021 Dietary Guidance to Improve Cardiovascular Health:
A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association

Population Approaches to Improve Diet, Physical Activity and Smoking Habits:
A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association

Well-being Works Better™

Employee Resources

Eat Smart

Fats

Heart-Check Food Certification Program

Nutrition Facts Label

Local AHA offices

Recipes

Sodium

Sugar

Other

DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) (NHLBI)

FoodSafety.gov

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



Healthier Cooking Methods

Healthy eating is more than just choosing healthier foods. Many food preparation techniques, including those below, help reduce saturated fat, sodium and calories while enhancing the flavor of the food.

- **Bake:** To cook in the oven without direct exposure to a flame, surrounding it with dry heat.
- **Baste:** To brush or spoon liquid over meat during roasting. This adds flavor and prevents drying out. Use fat-free, low-sodium liquids, such as water, wine or lemon juice.
- **Blanch:** To boil food briefly. After 30 seconds in boiling water, plunge the vegetable or other food or into ice water to stop the cooking. This keeps it tender-crisp.
- **Boil:** To cook food in heated water or other liquid, such as fat-free, low-sodium broth, that's bubbling vigorously.
- **Braise:** To cook food in a small amount of liquid on low heat and tightly covered (on the stovetop or in the oven), often browning first.
- **Broil:** To cook food directly under a heat source in an electric or gas oven.
- **Brown:** To quickly sauté, broil or grill at the beginning or end of meal preparation to enhance flavor, texture or appearance.
- **Grill:** To cook food on a metal grate directly over a radiant heat source, such as gas, coals, electricity or wood.
- **Marinate:** To coat or immerse foods in a liquid mixture or dry rub before cooking.
- **Poach:** To cook food gently immersed in simmering liquid over direct heat. This is a good method for cooking fish.
- **Roast:** To cook food uncovered in the oven at temperatures usually higher than baking.
- **Sauté:** To cook food quickly in a small amount of oil or liquid over direct heat.
- **Steam:** To cook food using steam, usually in a bamboo steamer or steamer basket over boiling or simmering water in a covered pan, or enclosed in a cooking parchment or aluminum foil, allowing the food to cook in its own juices. This helps keep foods' shape, texture and nutritional value intact.
- **Stew:** To cook food covered with liquid and simmered slowly in a tightly covered pot, usually for a long period of time.
- **Stir-fry:** To quickly cook small pieces of food in a large pan, usually a wok, over very high heat while constantly and briskly stirring the food.



Glossary of Nutrition and Food Terms

- **Added Sugars:** Sugar in food can be naturally occurring or added. Naturally occurring sugars are in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Added sugars include any caloric sweetener not naturally found in a food that's added during processing or preparation. Some common names for added sugars are: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrate, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, raw sugar, turbinado sugar, trehalose and sucrose. [Learn more](#)
- **Condiment:** A food product that's added to other foods to impart a particular flavor, enhance flavor or complement the dish. It may be applied by the diner or added prior to serving. Traditional condiments such as ketchup, mustard and mayonnaise can be high in sodium, added sugars and/or saturated and trans fats. They should be used sparingly, served on the side or substituted with healthier alternatives.
- **Daily Value (DV):** A reference value on the Nutrition Facts label that tells you the percent of the recommended daily amount of each nutrient in a single serving, usually based on a 2,000-calorie per day diet.
- **Dietary Fiber:** Dietary fiber describes several materials that make up the parts of plants your body can't digest. Whole grains and fruits and vegetables include dietary fiber, while most refined (processed) grains contain little fiber. Dietary fiber from whole grains, as part of an overall healthy diet, helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber-containing foods help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories and may help with weight management. [Learn more](#)
- **Fat-Free/Nonfat:** Products labeled fat-free must contain less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving. The FDA regulates the use of this term (and similar claims) by food manufacturers.
- **Legumes:** Grain legumes (also called pulses) include beans, lentils, peas and peanuts. Legumes are typically good sources of protein and fiber. [Learn more](#)
- **Low-Fat:** Products labeled low-fat must contain no more than 3 grams of fat per serving. The FDA regulates the use of this term (and similar claims) by food manufacturers.
- **Meal:** Foods and beverages for breakfast, lunch or dinner that includes two or more items from recommended food groups (grains, dairy, protein, fruits and vegetables) served in combination.
- **Nonnutritive Sweetener:** A food additive that duplicates the effect of sugar in taste, usually with less calories (sometimes called non-caloric sweetener). Some sugar substitutes are natural (stevia) and some are synthetic (aspartame, saccharin, sucralose). Those that are not natural are sometimes called artificial sweeteners. [Learn more](#)
- **Nutrition Facts Label:** An information panel required on most packaged foods and used by consumers to evaluate and compare nutritional value. In addition to the Nutrition Facts label, products may display other nutrition information or health claims on the package. Health claims are regulated by the FDA. [Learn more](#)
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that your body doesn't make but needs to function properly. Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly EPA and DHA, have been shown to benefit the heart. They can decrease the risk of arrhythmias (abnormal heartbeats), decrease triglyceride levels, slow the growth rate of atherosclerotic plaque and lower blood pressure. [Learn more](#)
- **Portion:** The amount of a food or beverage served for consumption by one person at one time; sometimes called a serving or helping. Portion is a subjective amount and can vary. It does not necessarily equal serving size, which is a standardized unit of measuring foods. One portion may contain more than one label serving.

- **Reference Amount Customarily Consumed (RACC):** The amount of a food or beverage customarily consumed by one person at one time, as determined by the FDA/USDA. A standardized serving size used as the basis for values on a Nutrition Facts label, RACC is often, but not always, the same as the label serving size.
- **Serving/Serving Size/Label Serving Size:** A standardized amount of food or beverage, such as a cup or an ounce, used in providing nutrition information. Serving size is referenced on the Nutrition Facts label for ease of comparison of nutrition information. It is not a dietary recommendation. One package or container of food or beverage may contain more than one serving.
- **Snack:** Food or beverage consumed between meals that tends to be smaller than a meal. This can refer to food served at a meeting break, items in vending machines or foods brought from home by employees.
- **Sodium:** A mineral that helps regulate the body's water balance, maintains normal heart rhythm and is responsible for nerve impulse conduction and muscle contraction. Getting too much sodium from food and beverages may contribute to high blood pressure in some people because it holds excess fluid in the body, creating an added burden on the heart. Salt and sodium are often used interchangeably, but they're not exactly the same. Sodium occurs naturally in foods or is added during manufacturing or both. Table salt is a combination of sodium and chloride. By weight, it's about 40% sodium and 60% chloride.
[Learn more](#)
- **Sugary Beverage:** A beverage sweetened with various forms of sugar that add calories. Examples include soda, fruit drinks, sports/energy drinks and tea drinks.
- **Sugars/Total Sugars:** The total amount of sugars in a food or beverage including those occurring naturally and those added during processing and preparation. The "Sugars" amount on the Nutrition Facts label includes both types, not just Added Sugars.
- **Vegetarian/Vegan:** The vegan or total vegetarian diet includes only foods from plants: fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, seeds and nuts. The lactovegetarian diet includes plant foods plus cheese and other dairy products. The ovo-lactovegetarian (or lacto-ovo-vegetarian) diet also includes eggs. A semi-vegetarian (or pescatarian) diet may include seafood and poultry, and sometimes other meats on an infrequent basis.
- **Whole Grain:** Grains and grain products made from the entire grain seed, usually called the kernel, which consists of the bran, germ and endosperm. Whole grains are generally good sources of dietary fiber. Examples include whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, whole cornmeal, brown rice and bulgur. Dietary fiber from whole grains, as part of an overall healthy diet, helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber-containing foods such as whole grains help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories and may help with weight management. [Learn more](#)

Toolkit Terminology

Throughout this toolkit, we use terms with the following definitions.

- **Culture of Health:** A culture in which people live, work, learn, play and pray in environments that support healthy behaviors, timely quality care and overall well-being. All people feel inspired and empowered to make healthy choices.
- **Food Environment:** Food and beverages included in surroundings (e.g., in vending machines, cafeterias, meetings/special occasions, kitchens) that affect a person's ability to choose healthy options.
- **Guidance:** Recommendations, ideas and quantitative standards to guide your efforts to create a healthier organization.
- **Guidelines:** Science-based, peer-reviewed statements that help doctors and patients decide appropriate treatment.
- **Office Food:** This refers to food in the workplace that's often provided at no cost to employees, available in a common area on a "help yourself" basis and/or brought in (store bought or homemade) by employees. Office food can also include leftovers from catered events.
- **Policy:** A course of action or rule intended to establish a procedure or protocol; policy can be established and adopted by governments (through regulation or legislation) or decision-makers to facilitate change within environments such as agencies, organizations, corporations, schools or communities.
- **Procurement:** The acquisition of goods or services; the purchase or acquisition of foods and beverages for consumption within the workplace or at conferences, meetings or other events.
- **Standards:** A set of nutrition criteria that may include nutrients to limit as well as foods and beverages to encourage; the standards establish the foods and beverages eligible to be served or purchased within a healthy environment.
- **Sustainable:** Produced with care for the environment, animals and people. Contributes to the capacity of the system to endure and remain viable over time.
- **Vending Machine:** A device that dispenses foods and beverages for a cost.
- **Vendor:** A restaurant, caterer, hotel or other provider of food and beverages for a cost.

