

Tips For Offering Healthier Options and Physical Activity at Workplace Meetings and Events

Easy access to healthier foods, beverages, and physical activity at work encourages healthier lifestyles among employees. Workplace practices and policies that support such access can make it much easier and more convenient for employees to choose healthier foods and engage in physical activity throughout their work day. Below are tips and resources for increasing healthier food and drink options at worksite meetings, parties, conferences, and events and for offering physical activity opportunities for employees throughout the work day.

Consuming a diet rich in nutrient-dense foods and beverages while maintaining a healthy weight through calorie balance and regular physical activity has been shown to contribute to a reduction in overweight and obesity and lower the risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease, some cancers, stroke, and diabetes.^{1,2} In 2011-2012, the prevalence of obesity in the United States was 33.5% among adult men and 36.1% among adult women.³

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 and the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans provide guidance on dietary patterns and physical activity levels that promote health and help prevent the effects of lifestyle-related chronic diseases.



Offer Healthier Food and Beverages at Workplace Meetings and Events

The following are tips on what you can do to encourage healthier food and beverage choices at workplace meetings, conferences, parties and other events:

1. Offer a colorful variety of fruit and vegetables.

- Ensure at least half of all food served is fruits and vegetables prepared and served without high amounts of added fats, sugars, or sodium (salt).
- Offer beans and legumes (e.g., black beans, chick peas) as vegetable-based protein sources.
- Display fruit and vegetables attractively and prominently. When served buffet style, place these foods near the front of the line to encourage their selection.
- Offer seasonal, local, or regional produce when available.
- Learn 10 tips to help you eat more [fruits](#) and [vegetables](#).

2. Offer 100% whole-grain products in a variety of forms.

- Offer whole-grain breads, rolls, and tortillas. Offer whole-grain pasta, brown rice, quinoa, and other whole grains as part of healthful salads and mixed dishes and casseroles.
- Offer whole-grain breakfast options such as oatmeal.
- Offer whole grain crackers and chips.
- Learn 10 tips to help you eat [whole grains](#).

3. Offer smaller portion sizes and prepare food in ways that reduce added calories.

- If offering meat, fish, or poultry serve portions 3 ounces or smaller.
- Offer meat, fish, or poultry prepared in healthier ways such as baked, broiled, steamed, or grilled.
- Offer cheeses in small portions (1/2 inch squares or smaller).
- Consider adding meat, fish, or poultry to stews, soups, salad, and mixed dishes as to [reduce protein portion sizes](#).

4. Do not offer foods that contain industrially produced (or artificial) trans-fatty acids.

- Check labels to ensure products have 0 grams of trans fats.
- Offer foods labeled as having 0 grams of trans fat and avoid offering foods with “partially hydrogenated” oils in the ingredient list.
- Limit foods that contain solid fats such as butter, which contains saturated fat, and partially hydrogenated oils, which contain synthetic trans fats.

5. Offer foods that are reduced or low in salt and sodium.

- Offer foods flavored with spices and herbs instead of salt.
- If purchasing packaged items, choose those labeled “low sodium” or “reduced sodium.”
- Offer meal items with less than 480 mg of sodium per serving.
- Learn 10 tips to help you cut back [salt and sodium](#).

6. Offer healthier condiments served on the side in small portions.

- Encourage condiments and dressings that contain healthful oils recommended by the Dietary Guidelines, 2010.
- Try to provide naturally low-fat condiments (e.g. mustard) and smaller portions of full fat dressings.
- Offer fat-free or low-fat dairy products for coffee and tea.

Remember to make half your plate fruit and vegetables.



7. Offer snacks that are low in calories and high in nutrients.

- Focus on nutrient-dense foods and beverages.
- Include healthier snack options such as fruit, vegetables, raw or dry-roasted nuts and seeds with low or no added salt or sugar, and 100% whole grain chips and healthy dips (salsas, guacamole or bean dips).
- Offer individual snack food items with less than 230 mg of sodium per serving.

8. Limit sweet treats

- Offer a selection of apples, bananas, pears, and other fruit individually, as a fruit salad, or added in desserts to reduce or replace added sugar.
- Offer frozen 100% juice bars or sorbets instead of high-calorie desserts.
- Only offer whole grain and low-sugar baked products.
- Only offer low-fat or non-fat yogurt, either plain or with fruit or healthful additions, minimizing added sugar.
- Offer smaller size or “mini” desserts to limit calories.

9. Discourage the practice of “Dumping” or leaving leftovers of less healthy foods (like Halloween candy or birthday cake) in common areas.

10. Offer water and low-calorie beverages.

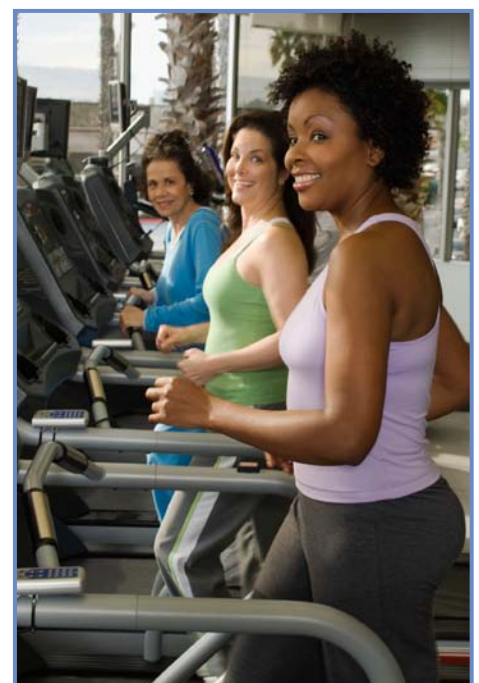
- Always offer water as a beverage.
- Offer drinks with no more than 40 calories per 12 ounce serving— include water with lemon, unsweetened coffee or tea, plain seltzer, or seltzer with a splash of 100% juice.
- Provide 12 oz. or smaller beverage cups.
- Provide pitchers and cups for drinking water throughout the event or party.

Active Workplace Practices

Offering opportunities for physical activity in your worksites can help employees get some of their daily physical activity goals and requirements met for the day. Below are tips for how you can add opportunities at work that might encourage increased physical activity among your employees.

1. Make physical activity an easy choice at work.

- Encourage casual dress so participants can comfortably engage in activities.
- Allow flexible schedules to encourage physical activity during lunch breaks or other breaks throughout the day.
- Identify and mark walking routes indoors and outdoors.
- Encourage use of stairwells. Place signs at the elevator directing people to the stairs, and make stairwells more appealing for use (consider music, lighting, cleanliness, and safety).
- Promote alternative commuting (biking, walking and public transportation).
- Provide exercise facilities, with lockers for change of clothes and showers, or partner with community organizations for reduced rates for your employees (e.g., YMCA).
- Encourage a variety of activities that are appropriate for people of all physical abilities.
- Provide guidance on activities that can be completed while sitting (i.e., desk exercises) or in a small area (i.e., walking in place).



2. Build physical activity into daily meetings.

- Include activity breaks in meeting agendas for longer meetings. Take moments to stand and stretch after sitting for an extended time.
- Organize walking meetings for small groups. Choose a safe route and keep a brisk walking pace for at least 10 minutes.

3. Build physical activity into conferences.

- Consider conference locations where participants can easily and safely walk to places of interest and have easy access to locations for activity during breaks.
- If feasible, choose a conference facility that includes a fitness center, an outdoor green space, or a room with space to move around and stretch.
- Consider asking someone to lead physical activity breaks (can be a guest or coworker).
- Try activities like standing for every other topic, stretching to music, or icebreakers that encourage people to move around.
- Make meeting space easy for people who prefer to stand instead of sit.
- Organize physical activity opportunities in mornings or afternoons, such as group walks or low-impact fitness classes.
- Provide participants with maps of the area showing safe walking and running routes, trails, or local fitness centers.



4. Ask employees or meeting participants what activities they like, and cater to the group.

- Survey employees on what makes conferences, meetings, and the office environment more supportive of physical activity.
- Encourage feedback about activities to incorporate into meetings.
- Consider convening a worksite committee on physical activity and/or workplace wellness.

Resources

Healthy Eating:

- Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010
- USDA Choose MyPlate
- USDA's Ten Tips Nutrition Series
- Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations

Physical Activity:

- 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
- Be Active Your Way Steps to Wellness: A Guide to Implementing the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans in the Workplace
- Short Physical Activity Breaks
- CDC Stairwell to Better Health

Additional Resources on Healthy Meetings Guidelines:

- Network for a Healthy California
- NY State Guidelines for a Healthy Meeting
- Washington State Energize Your Meetings
- King County, Washington State Healthy Food Choices for Meetings
- Thurston County, Washington State—Healthy Workplace Toolkit:
- Eat Smart North Carolina
- American Cancer Society—Meeting Well:
- National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, Healthy Meeting Toolkit
- Walking Meetings

References

1. US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010, 7th Edition*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; 2010.
2. US Department of Health and Human Services. *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; 2008.
3. Cynthia L. Ogden, Margaret D. Carroll, Brian K Kit, Katherine M. Flegal. Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the United States, 2011-2012. *JAMA*. 2014;311(8): 806-814. doi:10.1001/jama.2014.732.