

Meetings and Catered Events



Department of
Health

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ASSESSING & EVALUATING MEETINGS AND CATERED EVENTS

Assessing Food and Beverage Products:

Use the Healthy Meal Scorecard at the end of this section to determine the healthy food/meal score of selections offered during a meeting or event.

Evaluating Customer Acceptance:

Staff and customer surveys are an excellent way to increase customer buy-in when introducing new or different options. Use the Healthy Meeting/Event Survey at the end of this section to evaluate the acceptance of food and beverages offered at the end of a meeting/event. These tools should be completed before any product changes are made to assess the current environment, and periodically as new products are added/changed to assess improvements.

TIPS AND GUIDANCE FOR USING THESE MATERIALS

Policy Considerations:

Having a policy stating that food served at organization meetings and events includes healthy options sends a clear message that the health and wellness of attendees is valued. Decide if you want to create a policy that dictates food and beverage standards at one or more of the following events: on-site meetings, off-site meetings, conference events, etc. Having an organizational policy is sustainable; even if leadership changes, healthy standards will be a part of routine business operations.

Phase-In Approach:

If making drastic changes all at once is overwhelming, follow a phase-in approach to gradually improve food and beverage options. Work with vendors/food providers on a timeline and options for ordering healthier foods. Begin with making small changes to on-site meetings, and over time, introduce changes to larger catered events and conference dining.

Catered Events vs. Food from Home:

Oftentimes food is made at home and brought in to share during a meeting or event. Having the same nutrition standards for these snacks and meals is important to uphold the organization's culture of health. Communicate the standards and share ideas about how to work toward meeting them. Utilizing healthy meeting sign-up sheets can make the transition easier. An example of a mealtime DIY taco bar can be found at the end of this section.



Do not serve food if the meeting/event is between meal times; instead include opportunities for physical activity. Healthy beverages may still be provided.

HEALTHIER FOOD SWAPS

Remember: All food swaps should still meet the nutrition standards.

Beverage Swaps:

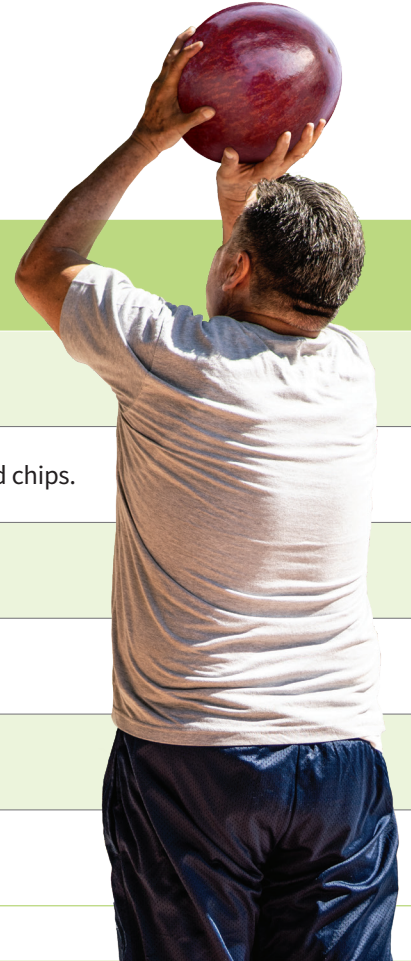
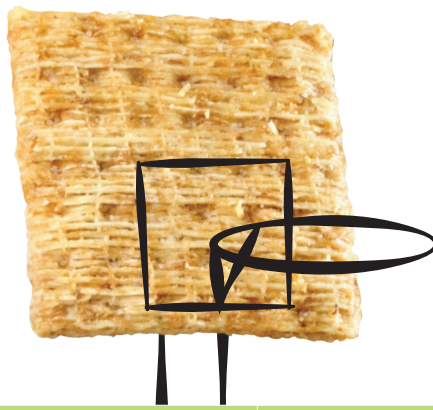
Choose...	Instead of...
Water (plain, sparkling, or flavored), coffee, tea, 100% juice.	Sugar-sweetened beverages.
Low-fat or non-fat milk.	Whole, 2% milk, or half and half.

Breakfast Food Swaps:

Choose...	Instead of...
Fruit, fresh or canned in water or 100% juice; unsweetened applesauce.	Fruits in heavy syrup.
Small whole grain bagels or muffins, low-fat granola bars.	Croissants, doughnuts, sweet rolls, pastries.
Unsweetened whole grain cereals.	Sweetened cereals and refined grain cereals.

Lunch and Dinner Food Swaps:

Choose...	Instead of...
Whole grain pasta salads with light vinaigrette.	Pasta salads made with mayonnaise.
Whole grain breads.	Croissants and white breads.
Greek yogurt, low-fat sour cream, and vegetable toppings.	Butter, sour cream, and bacon bit toppings.
Vegetable plate with hummus or whole grain breads with olive oil.	Bread basket with butter.
Desserts such as fresh fruit, low-fat plain yogurt, or frozen yogurt.	Desserts such as ice cream, cheesecake, pies, cream puffs, cake, pastries, cobbler.
Dips such as salsa, hummus, bean-based.	Dips made with mayonnaise, sour cream, cream cheese, or cheese sauce.



Snack Food Swaps:

Choose...	Instead of...
Cut up fruits and vegetables.	Chips and cookies.
Whole grain crackers or light popcorn.	Refined grain crackers and chips.
Plain yogurt and berries, yogurt dip with fruit.	Ice cream bars.
Whole grain granola bars.	Candy and snack cakes.
Vegetables with hummus, salsa, low-fat dressing.	Chips and dip.
Fruit cups in water or 100% juice.	Pudding cups.

STEPS FOR WORKING WITH CATERERS TO DETERMINE THE MENU

1. Start with the initial menu provided.
2. Identify where modifications are needed to fit the nutrition standards (cooking methods, portion sizes, substitutions).
3. Ask for fruits and/or vegetables to be served in larger portions and variety.
4. Specify that drinking water be provided at all times.
5. Request that whole grain options be used whenever possible.
6. Ask about using lower-sodium options.
7. Request at least one vegetarian option with a meat alternative.
8. Ask about eco-friendly opportunities such as locally sourced food, reusable dishware and linens, composting, etc.

For more inspiration, tips, and guidance on working with hotels and caterers, refer to the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity Healthy Meeting Toolkit and American Heart Association Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit.

ACTION PLAN CHECKLIST:



- Gather commitment and engagement from staff in relevant departments.
- Assess your current meeting and event food offerings.
- Identify vendors/food providers (caterers, restaurants, grocery stores) in your area that are possible options for in-house catering.
- Set up a 15-minute informational interview with vendors. Ask these six initial questions:
 - Do you currently offer healthier items on your menu?
 - What are your healthier menu offerings?
 - Have any other companies requested healthier meals? If so, how is that going?
 - Do you purchase from any local food sources/producers?
 - Can you accommodate special requests such as vegetarian, gluten-free, or other?
 - Can you provide calorie and sodium content for your menu offerings?
- Select the vendor(s) you think can best meet your needs.
- Email your organization to communicate upcoming changes and complete the Healthy Meeting/Event Survey at the next several meetings for baseline assessment of food acceptance and ideas for future changes.
- Plan a longer, in-person meeting with the vendor's primary contact(s) to discuss:
 - Meeting the American Heart Association nutrition standards.
 - Identifying menu offerings that may be acceptable and discussing possible substitutions.
 - Other important issues such as minimum order, cost, notice required, delivery time, supplies, etc.
- Draft policies (if needed).
- Decide on a timeline with vendors and begin making changes.
- Have attendees complete the Healthy Meeting/Event Survey at the end of meetings/events in which new foods were served; communicate results.
- Work with vendors to make desired changes as needed based on consumer acceptance and organization needs.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Product

- Clearly label which items are healthier options.

Placement

- Place healthy options where they are easily visible.
- Offer healthier options multiple times, including at the beginning and the front sections of the serving line.



Promotion

- Include healthy cooking tips and recipes routinely in newsletters and emails.
- Host lunch and learn, taste testing, and recipe swap events.
 - Tip: Reach out to your local extension office or health department for support.
 - Example topics: Meal Planning; Shopping for Healthy Foods on a Budget; Reading Nutrition Labels; Adding Physical Activity to Your Routine; Fats, Carbohydrates, Protein, and Fiber; Common Myths and Fad Diets; Salt and Sugar.
- Hang Good Food Here posters and/or place table tents during meetings and events.
- Paint a fruit and vegetable mural or post other healthy food visuals.



HEALTHY MEETING SCORECARD

	0 points	1 point	2 points
Is water available?	No.	Yes, but not enough for all and/or takes some effort to access.	Yes, it is freely available and easily accessible.
Is there a whole/sliced fruit option available (not juice)?	No whole fruit options are available.	Yes, but not enough for everyone.	Yes, enough for everyone to have a full serving.
Is there a non-fried vegetable option available?	No non-fried vegetable options are available.	Yes, but not enough for everyone.	Yes, enough for everyone to have a full serving.
Is there a whole grain option available?	No whole grain options are available.	Yes, but not enough for everyone.	Yes, enough for everyone to have a full serving.
Is there a lean meat and/or meat alternative available?	No lean meat or meat alternative is available.	Yes, but not enough for everyone.	Yes, enough for everyone to have a full serving.
Are unsweetened dairy items available?	No dairy options are available.	Yes, but not enough for everyone.	Yes, enough for everyone to have a full serving.
Are cookies, candies, sweets, and/or pastries available?	Yes, in large portion sizes.	Yes, but only in small portion sizes.	No cookies, candies, sweets and/or pastries are available.
Are salty, high saturated fat snacks available?	Yes, in large portion sizes.	Yes, but only in small portion sizes.	No salty, high saturated fat snacks are available.
Are vegetarian options available?	No.	Unappealing vegetarian option or too few servings.	Appealing vegetarian options, including a meat alternative.
Are sugar-sweetened beverages available?	Yes, only sweetened beverages are available.	Yes, sweetened and unsweetened beverages are available.	No, only water and unsweetened beverages are available.
Are opportunities available for brief activity breaks?	No.	Yes, but not hourly.	Yes, hourly.
Column point totals:	0	1 x <input type="text"/> = <input type="text"/>	2 x <input type="text"/> = <input type="text"/>

Grand total: _____

A total score of 18 or more: Congratulations! You hosted a healthy meeting!

A total score of 12–17: You are on the right track!

A total score of 11 or less: Improvement needed.

HEALTHY MEETING/EVENT SURVEY

[ORGANIZATION] is conducting a survey to gather information about the food and beverages served at [EVENT]. Our goal is to offer healthy options you will enjoy. Thank you for your input.

1. Do you think this meeting provided enough healthy food options?

- ☐ Yes, there were plenty of healthy food options.
- ☐ No, there were not enough healthy food options.
- ☐ I do not know or do not have an opinion.

Additional ideas/thoughts to share: _____

2. Did you like the food served at this meeting?

- ☐ Yes, very much.
- ☐ Neutral.
- ☐ No, not at all.
- ☐ I do not know or do not have an opinion.

3. What were your favorite food options provided at this meeting? _____

4. What were your least favorite food options provided at this meeting? _____

5. Did you like the beverage options provided at this meeting?

- ☐ Yes, very much.
- ☐ Neutral.
- ☐ No, not at all.
- ☐ I do not know or do not have an opinion.

6. Do you have any additional suggestions or recommendations about the foods and beverages served at this meeting? _____

7. What healthy foods and beverages would you like to see offered at future meetings? _____

DO-IT-YOURSELF TACO BAR

A fun twist on the traditional potluck! Everyone brings one or two ingredients to create a buffet style bar. Simply write your name next to the ingredient you would like to bring!

Tortillas

Soft Corn Tortillas: _____

Whole Wheat Tortillas: _____

Baked Tortilla Chips: _____

Other: _____

Filling Grains

Brown Rice: _____

Quinoa: _____

Other: _____

Tasty Toppings

Diced Tomatoes: _____

Shredded Lettuce: _____

Sautéed Peppers and Onions: _____

Corn: _____

Low-fat Sour Cream: _____

Low-fat Cheese: _____

Radishes: _____

Other: _____

Hearty Toppings

Black Beans: _____

Pinto Beans: _____

Chicken: _____

Lean Ground Beef: _____

Other: _____

Flavorful Salsa

Tomato Salsa: _____

Salsa Verde: _____

Corn Salsa: _____

Guacamole: _____

Other: _____

Fruity Sides

Fruit Salad: _____

Assorted Melons: _____

Diced Pineapples: _____

Other: _____

Beverages

Water: _____

Fruit-Infused Water: _____

Unsweetened Iced Tea: _____

Tea and Hot Water: _____

Coffee: _____

Other: _____

Serveware

Plates: _____

Bowls: _____

Napkins: _____

Spoons/Forks/Knives: _____

Cups (Hot & Cold): _____

SAMPLE POLICY

Rationale of Policy:

[Insert organization] is committed to the health and well-being of our employees. The strong relationship between diet and health and the increasing rates of overweight and obesity make supporting nutritious choices at work part of our commitment to health. The following guidelines were designed to make the healthy food and beverage choice the easy choice. By following these guidelines, we can promote better health and help reduce risks for chronic diseases.

Policy Components:

Effective [insert date], it is the policy of [insert organization] that when foods and beverages are purchased with [insert organization] funds, served on [insert organization] property, and/or served at [insert organization]-sponsored meetings or events, the vendor must comply with the following nutrition standards recommended by the American Heart Association.



Food Standards:

At least [insert percent] % of foods provided should meet these standards:

Snacks (except plain nuts and nut/fruit mixes)

- ≤ 200 calories per label serving.
- ≤ 240 mg sodium per label serving.
- ≤ 1 g saturated fat.
- Grain-based bars ≥ 10% daily value dietary fiber and ≤ 7 g total sugars per label serving.

NOTE: Sugar-free mints and gum are acceptable.

Plain Nuts and Nut/Fruit Mixes

- Serving size ≤ 1.5 ounces (1 ounce preferred).
- ≤ 140 mg sodium per label serving.
- ≤ 7 g added sugar per label serving.

Entrées

- ≤ 500 calories.
- ≤ 15 g total fat (excluding nuts, seeds, and products containing nuts or nut butters).
- ≤ 2 g saturated fat (per 200 calories; excluding nuts, seeds, and products containing nuts or nut butters).
- ≤ 230 mg sodium.
- 10 g added sugar.
- ≥ 2 g fiber (if product is grain-based or potato-based)

Meals

- ≤ 700 calories.
- ≤ 800 mg sodium (≤ 525 mg preferred).
- ≤ 5 g saturated fat.
- At least 2 servings (1–1.5 cups) of vegetables and/or fruits.

Beverage Standards:

At least [insert percent] % of beverages provided should meet these standards:

Water

- Plain, sparkling, and flavored.
- ≤ 10 calories per serving.

Milk

- Fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and milk alternatives (soy, almond, etc.).
- ≤ 130 calories per 8 fluid ounces.

Unsweetened Coffee and Tea

100% Fruit or Vegetable Juice

- No added sugars/sweeteners, except non-nutritive sweeteners.
- ≤ 120 calories per 8 fluid ounces.
- ≤ 150 calories per 10 fluid ounces.
- ≤ 180 calories per 12 fluid ounces.

All Other Beverages

- ≤ 10 calories per serving

Implementation Standards

The vendor must:

- Work with [insert organization] staff to highlight healthier options using signage or displays.
- Promote healthier portion sizes by using smaller-sized dishware and serveware.

Considerations

The vendor should consider:

- Providing [weekly/monthly] sales data to [insert organization] on a [weekly/monthly] basis.
- Providing nutrition information for each food and beverage offered including (but not limited to) calories, sodium, sugar, and saturated fat.
- Providing a variety of prepared foods that appeal to consumers with diverse dietary requirements and preferences, including but not limited to vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, low sodium, and low sugar.
- Strategically placing foods and beverages to encourage consumers to select healthier options.

Monitoring, Compliance, and Review

- An employee survey will be administered [annually] that evaluates the use of the policy and seeks further suggestions for its improvement and ongoing implementation.
- An assessment of [meetings/events] will be administered [monthly] by [insert staff member/committee/organization] to evaluate compliance with the policy standards.
- [Insert name of organization] will evaluate and update this policy [6 months] from implementation and every [2 years] after, at minimum.

Signature (Organization)

Date

Signature (Vendor)

Date

Resources:

- Exceed: The Tool for Using Healthy Food Service Guidelines. (2017). Change Lab Solutions.
- Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit. (2014). American Heart Association.
- Key Components of Food Procurement & Vending Policies. (2015). Public Health Law Center.

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