

SHARING COMMON KNOWLEDGE FOR HEALTHY WORKPLACES

PROMOTING HEALTHY FOODS IN THE WORKPLACE

Why it is important to promote healthy food choices in the workplace?

Employees spend much of their time at work which includes several meals and snack times. The workplace serves as an important avenue for promoting healthy behaviors including eating habits. Research indicates that by combining access to and promotion of healthy food options in the workplace, employees can and will make healthier choices thereby reducing health risks and therefore reducing the total cost of health. Eating healthy is a very important strategy to keeping weight off and managing most chronic conditions. Healthy employees are also less absent, more productive, and more engaged.

What can employers do to promote healthy food choices in the workplace?

Employers can provide environmental strategies to support healthy eating by their employees, business partners, and guests. They can also have formal and informal policies that encourage healthy eating during the workday and at business events.

MEETINGS/EVENTS

Utilize guidelines for healthy meetings, catering, and events such as:

- MSDH Healthy Catering and Event Guide:
http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/4717.pdf
- MSDH Healthy Meetings Website:
http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/43,5269,277.html

LUNCH/BREAK ROOMS

Encourage employees to bring their own lunches and snack items by providing break/lunch rooms with the following:

- Refrigerators and freezers for food storage
- Microwaves and small ovens
- Hot and cold water dispensers
- Adequate seating and table space

VENDING MACHINES

If your worksite has food and/or beverage machines:

- Build a healthy partnership with your vending company
- Follow healthy vending guidelines by national organizations
- Increase the number of healthy items available in the machines for purchase
- Make the healthy items the same price or cheaper than the less-healthy options
- Place the healthier items at eye-level or in the top half of the vending machine
- Promote healthy options in vending machines on or near the machines while also using company communication channels
- Be sure to have bottled water as a beverage option
- Track sales of healthy items

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CAFETERIAS

If your worksite has an onsite cafeteria, increase the availability of healthy choices and promote the healthy options and importance/benefits of eating healthy by:

- Making the healthy options the same price or cheaper than the less-healthy options (may require employer to subsidize)
- Creating a healthy meal deal where you buy 9 and get the 10th free.
- Making the healthy options tasty, desirable
- Placing the healthy items strategically, such as at eye-level, in easy to reach locations
- Providing nutrition information (calories, fat, sodium, etc.) next to the food option, on menu boards, in areas where they will see them as they wait in line for the food, and at point of purchase
- Using promotional materials to promote healthy food choices and explain why these changes are happening. Examples include flyers, pamphlets, digital signage, emails, intra/internet sites, and social media
- Hosting taste testing events to sample the new healthy options
- Hosting seminars, lunch and learns to promote healthy eating behaviors

EATING OUT

- Create a guide for employees that identifies local restaurants with healthy choices
- Provide handouts and pamphlets with tips for making healthier choices when eating out
 - MSDH Healthy Choice for Eating Out page 1:
http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/4336.pdf
 - MSDH Healthy Choices for Eating Out page 2:
http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/4337.pdf

PROMOTE LOCAL, FRESH PRODUCE

- Encourage participation in local farmers markets by locating your closest ones at <http://msfarmersmarket.com/>
- Your worksite can host a farmers market by working with a local farmer to come by your workplace and promote to your employees and their families.
- Your worksite can promote and even serve as a drop-off location for a local farmers farm share (a pre-packaged weekly box of your local farmer's harvest throughout the growing season), also known as a CSA – Community Supported Agriculture.
- To find a CSA and farm near you, visit www.localharvest.org/csa/

PROGRAMMING AND EDUCATION

Employers can educate employees and their families on healthy eating by providing education and resources. Basic education is common place, however teaching skills to build self-efficacy with shopping, meal preparation, and cooking will help make it easier to eat healthy on a regular basis. Consider hosting some of the following programs and education related to healthy food and nutrition:



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- Gardening for vegetables and herbs
- Grocery and Farmer Market shopping
- Basic nutrition facts, how to read nutrition facts labels
- Cooking demonstrations (healthy recipes)
- Basic food preparation skills
- Local farm tours
- Understanding Food jargon (defining “organic” vs. “natural”, cage-free vs. free-range eggs, etc.)
- Offering healthy parties and events such as healthy pot-lucks
- Making workplace celebrations healthy

COMMON CONCERNS AND BARRIERS

“Vendors are hard to work with because they don’t think that healthy items will sell as well and will therefore negatively affect their bottom line.”

- Research shows that healthy options sell well and often times even better than less-healthy options.
https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/revenue_fact_sheet.pdf
- Some tips for working with vendors include the importance of building and maintaining a collaborative partnership and a willingness to help subsidize healthy options. Remember, you (the employer) have leverage as the vendor wants your business/contract.

“Employees are not interested in eating healthy and will be upset with changes.”

- Most Americans are interested in eating healthier but can be overwhelmed by perceptions of healthy food not tasting good and being too expensive. Cooking demonstrations and taste tests are easy ways to teach employees how to use healthier ingredients so that they can still eat the foods that they want to eat, with simple substitutions.
- It is important to involve and engage employees throughout the process of increasing the availability of healthy food at the workplace by conducting surveys, holding focus groups and communicating changes ahead of time and often.

“There is not enough leadership support to ensure that healthy food programs and/or policies are successful and sustainable.”

- It is important to gain the support from leadership. Consider finding somebody within the company’s leadership who can serve as a champion for your workplace’s healthy food promotions.

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- Research shows that eating healthy not only improves health but also enhances employee productivity and reduces absenteeism at the workplace.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit – American Heart Association

http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@fc/documents/downloadable/ucm_465693.pdf

Healthier Vending Machine Initiatives in State Facilities – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/pdf/healthy_vending_machine_initiatives_in_state_facilities.pdf

Model Beverage and Food Vending Machine Standards – National Alliance for Nutrition & Activity

<https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/draftbeveragefoodstandards.pdf>

Financial Implications of Healthy Vending – Center for Science in the Public Interest

https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/revenue_fact_sheet.pdf

Healthy Catering Policy – Mississippi State Department of Health

<http://www.msdh.state.ms.us/msdhsite/index.cfm/43,6661,277,pdf/MSDHHealthyCateringPolicy.pdf>

Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities – U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/guidelines_for_federal_concessions_and_vending_operations.pdf

Understanding the GSA/HHS Health and Sustainability Guidelines – U.S. General Services Administration/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/6657.pdf

Farm to Office: Tips for Starting a Workplace CSA - United Missouri Bancshares, Inc.

<http://blog.umb.com/workplace-csa/>

Worksite Farmers' Market How-To Guide – HAP Health Plan

https://www.hap.org/~/_media/files/hap/for-employer/farmers-market.pdf

8 Steps to a Healthy Breakroom for Your Employees – BenefitsPRO.com

<http://www.benefitspro.com/2016/11/17/8-steps-to-a-healthy-breakroom-for-your-employees>

