



GUIDE TO A HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Prevention Partners is dedicated to helping your worksite promote healthy eating through stronger policies for vending machines, cafeterias, snack shops, catered events and other places where food is provided. The Nutrition Toolbox is designed to be used hand in hand with the Recommendations Report and Action Plan to help your worksite get to an 'A' in Nutrition.

Here are the five strategic methods we recommend to make healthy food a priority and easy to access:

Key Components of a Healthy Food Environment

1. Increase Access to Healthy Foods
2. Use Pricing Structure to Encourage Customers to Purchase Healthy Items
3. Promote Healthy Foods using proven Marketing Techniques
4. Structure Benefit Design and/or Wellness Incentives to Encourage Healthy Behaviors
5. Offer Educational Materials to Promote Awareness and Adoption of Healthy Behaviors

These guidelines should be applied to all places where food and beverages are sold or provided, including cafeterias, vending machines, catering, food carts, shops, and meetings or other events. The assessment and its tailored reports are evidence-based and practice-tested, meaning that they have been developed with sound science and tested in real worksites to ensure its feasibility.

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GET STARTED

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Getting Started** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click Search*

Before you can create a healthy food environment, there are some things you may want to consider before getting started:

➤ **Get buy-in from your President/CEO**

When establishing wellness and healthy lifestyle policies, you'll need some high-level support. Programs without executive support have a hard time sustaining momentum and participation, and often fail. And you don't want to risk getting your wellness program cancelled because you forgot to ask the boss. Involving executives early and getting them to publicly make wellness a priority will help staff and employees see the policy as a part of the organization's permanent culture, not just a temporary campaign or promotion.

➤ **Organize a wellness committee**

Now that you've been given the green light to get well at work, it's time to get your wellness team together. Don't worry if you're the only person who's on your committee (actually, think how much easier it will be to schedule meetings). But if you can secure some help, you'll get input (and buy-in) from a team that shares responsibilities and supports one another. This will greatly improve the chances that your program will succeed and keep employees healthy and productive.

➤ **Use WorkHealthy America to its fullest capacity**

Your access to this document and the toolbox indicates that you have taken at least one Nutrition assessment and have answered questions about your organization's overall eating/food environments.

Some next steps include downloading the Recommendations report for a list of the high-level actions you should take to increase access to healthy foods. Consider using this report as a check-list for your wellness committee. If you get stuck on a Recommendation, view the Action Plan for this wellness topic and get short-term and long-term specific action steps and linked resources to help you. Searching for resources in the toolbox will also assist you in your efforts, as will attending webinars and other events. Resources available include fact sheets, implementation guides, sample policies, case studies and webinars, to name a few.

➤ **Get ready to monitor and evaluate the success of your Healthy Food Environment**

For any program to be successful, you'll need to be ready evaluate its effectiveness and impact. By simply monitoring food sales and employee attitudes, for example, you will be able to identify the items and services that are most popular and help employees and visitors to make more informed choices. Remember, evaluation must be a continuous process because, as attitudes changes, so do trends in purchasing behavior before and after promotions. Monitoring sales and attitudes will help you make smart marketing decisions and this will help you better serve your customers.



KEY COMPONENT 1: ACCESS

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Access** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click Search*

Make Healthy Foods Available

It would be great if people always ate healthy foods, but it's not up to us to tell others what they can or can't eat. A more reasonable approach is to **make sure people at least have the chance to choose a healthy option**. By making healthy choices available, people are more likely to choose them. (Access alone won't make this happen – you'll need to read our pages on pricing and education, too). As an employer, it's in your best interests to give employees as many healthy options as possible.

There are four components to making healthy foods easily accessible:

1. Use Standard Nutrition Criteria

What does it mean for food to be healthy? Unfortunately, there is no single best-practice criteria for healthy food. In general, 'healthy' means that the nutrient content levels do not exceed measures for the appropriate portion size of any given food item. It can also mean meeting dietary guidelines and recommendations for consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and items that are low in fat and sugar.

The good news is that Prevention Partners has rigorously reviewed the existing science and come up with nutrition criteria for you to use when identifying healthy options. These criteria set a minimum standard; we encourage you to make the criteria more restrictive in order to address the specific needs of your customers (highly diabetic, hypertensive, overweight, etc.).

Having trouble finding delicious and easy large-quantity recipes with nutrition criteria? Check out our recipe box, consisting of the tastiest and best-selling healthy recipes in select NC hospitals. The recipe box includes more than 100 recipes, instructions, marketing tips and nutrition analysis.



2. Work with Vendors to Procure Healthy Options

Most worksites work with outside vendors to bring in food—from catering, to vending, even to cafeterias. If you haven't reviewed your contracts with them lately, now is the perfect time. More and more clients are revising their vendor agreements to make sure healthy options are on the menu because most customers, when asked, prefer to have a healthy option. Vendors are aware of the consumer shift to wanting healthy options. In fact, many vendors and distributors offer resources to help food service operations identify foods that best fit healthy menu design. We can show you a few ways you can modify contracts with vendors to ensure that healthy options are available in your facility every day.

Keep it Local! Providing farmers' markets and community-supported



agriculture (CSAs) makes it easier for employees to have easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Search the toolbox to learn how other worksites have successfully brought farmers' markets and CSA's to work, check out our tips, and view national resources for building Farmers' Markets and CSAs.

3. Foodservice Staff Training

Many Food and Nutrition Service directors cite the current trend of general "cooks" in food service settings with limited knowledge of how to prepare foods from recipes and fresh products. By training staff to prepare and consistently use healthy recipes, worksites can transform the current kitchen culture and bring fresh, healthy foods into their cafeterias.

4. Provide Healthy Foods at All Operating Hours

Compared to day shift workers, evening and night shift workers have reported gaining more weight. Obesity, high triglycerides, and low HDL (aka, "good" cholesterol) levels occur more often in shift workers than in day workers. Healthy options should be available during all hours of operation.





KEY COMPONENT 2: PRICING

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Pricing** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click **Search***

Use Pricing to Promote Healthy Options

When asked why they don't eat healthy, many people cite the higher cost of more nutritious options. Since healthy foods are often more expensive than less healthy foods, adjusting the price of healthy foods can eliminate the cost argument and help people decide what to eat based on nutrition content, rather than price.

Using pricing to promote healthy foods does not necessarily mean slashing the cost of healthy items—often simply creating a healthy meal-deal, deeper discounts on healthy foods, or 'Buy 9 get the 10th free' healthy item cards will promote cost savings. Many worksites have used price to promote healthy foods without loss of sales (search for our case studies in the toolbox); some even report sales increases. Also, using pricing methods to promote healthy foods can also mean that you provide healthy options at no cost! You may want to consider providing fresh fruit bowls or other healthy options for free to all employees. And Prevention Partners, we offer free fruit, nuts and whole grain crackers, in addition to water, tea and coffee, to our employees at no cost.

FirstHealth of the Carolinas implemented an innovative pricing strategy that resulted in significant increases in purchases of healthy items, with no net loss of revenue. This case study has been reviewed and determined an effective intervention strategy by the CDC's Center of Excellence for Training and Research Translation (Center TRT).

By providing healthy and affordable meals, worksites can create a market for healthier goods and incentivize employees to purchase healthy options. By making the connection between cost savings and the health benefit in purchasing healthy options, you can help your employees, staff and visitors understand the advantages of choosing healthy options.





KEY COMPONENT 3: MARKETING

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Marketing** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click Search*

Promote Healthy Foods

You've done a great job of getting healthy foods, and you've priced them to sell or offered them for free. Now you have to tell people that they're available! Our goal is to make healthy choices easier to identify and see.

There are three basic components to marketing your healthy options:

1. Post Nutrition Information at the Point-of-Selection

Since consumers are often unaware of the nutrient content of foods, having access to nutrition information at the point they are selecting their food helps them make an informed, healthy choice. It is important for all consumers to know the nutritive value what they're going to eat and how it fits into their daily nutrition budget.

Posting basic nutrition information is a great way to help consumers see and better understand nutrition labels and how each nutrient relates to their overall health. We have examples in the toolbox of how nutrition information can be posted at the point of selection.

2. Use an Icon to Identify Healthy Options

Targeted, strategic placement of nutrition messages affects purchasing or consumption. Being able to easily identify a healthy option by using an icon gives healthy food a "brand" that sticks with the consumers and makes the healthy choice stand out. Whatever the icon is, it must be used consistently and you must educate consumers about what the icon means. Consumers that use food labels properly will improve the choices that they make and improve their diet.

3. Make your Healthy Options Easy to See and Find

To increase the likelihood that employees will buy or consume healthy items, put them in plain view. Since product placement in grocery stores affects purchasing, effective placement of healthy foods in cafeterias or at meetings or other eating venues can increase consumption of these items.





KEY COMPONENT 4: BENEFITS

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Benefits** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click Search*

Use Benefits and Incentives to Encourage Behavior Change

There is a common notion that says people are only going to do as much as they're incentivized to do, especially when it comes to their health. As an employer, it is in your best interest to incentivize your employees to live healthier lives.

The long-term benefits of having healthy employees outweigh the short-term costs associated with incentivizing healthy behaviors. With a growing public interest in healthcare and employment policies aimed at obesity prevention and treatment, employers are in constant search of the appropriate formula that will help their employees make permanent lifestyle changes.

Incentives can help drive employees to wellness benefits and programs. Through the worksite wellness program, benefits package, or direct financial and other incentives, employees can be encouraged to purchase and eat healthier foods.

*Want to do even more? **Make it easy for mothers to have access to private and comfortable space to breastfeed or express breast milk.*** Breastfeeding is good for babies, mothers, and the community. Mothers who breastfeed their babies are in better health, and children who are breastfed for at least six months are less likely to suffer from overweight, diabetes and other illness. A breastfeeding policy makes your worksite's commitment clear.

The Affordable Care Act requires worksites with more than 50 employees to provide reasonable break time and a private, non-bathroom place for nursing mothers to express breast milk during the workday, for one year after a child's birth.

Communicate Effectively to Staff

Communicate these benefits and incentives in simple and clear steps. Effective communication channels include new employee orientation, policies and procedures manuals, performance reviews and direct communications from leadership.



KEY COMPONENT 5: EDUCATION

*To search for essential resources and tools for this wellness topic, select **Education** from the Key Component drop-down options in the Nutrition toolbox search and click Search*

Use Education to Support Healthy Behaviors

A core component of getting people to change their behavior is education. A good health education campaign lets people know the effect of poor health habits and all the benefits of making better choices. Strategic, effective health communication can improve knowledge of and change negative attitudes about healthy eating.

When used effectively, education can cause positive behavior changes and reduce the risk of both chronic and infectious diseases. A well-organized nutrition campaign, coordinated with the other guidelines, will have the highest impact and success amongst your employees.

We have examples of how you can begin educating your employees on eating healthier. Most importantly, it is essential to see food as a beautiful, delicious and healthy part of life, not an enemy.

Don't have a dietitian on staff? We do! Use some of the presentations, handouts and other tools compiled by our Dietitian Consultant (found in the toolbox). These tools are practical and easy to use.

Want to do even more? Make it a community effort! Check out the MooreFit Challenge, a community-wide initiative created from the vision and leadership of the local hospital and school system. Also look into the Lighten Up 4 Life community weight loss initiative, led by the hospital, county health department, and the local newspaper.

