

Healthy workplace catering

Healthy eating is essential for good health. Serving healthier food in the workplace is an important part of promoting health and wellbeing among your staff.

By making sure that healthy choices are available at all functions and in onsite cafeterias, you make it easier for your staff to make better food choices.

Healthy workplace catering is easy and involves a wide variety of tasty, attractive foods. It can be as simple as:

- limiting foods high in unhealthy saturated and trans fats, salt and sugar
- including more fruit and vegetables
- reducing serve sizes.

Our *Healthy eating and drinking* information sheet is a good guide to help you to provide healthier food choices at work. It's also a great resource to give to your staff to help them make better food choices at home.

Developing a workplace healthy catering policy can help to drive culture change among your staff. It's also the best way to ensure long-term commitment to healthier food and drink choices in the workplace.

A workplace healthy catering policy makes it easier for everyone in your workplace (including staff, volunteers and board members) to follow consistent catering practices. It should apply to all workplace catering, internal and external, including staff meetings, shared morning or afternoon teas, breakfast meetings, Christmas parties, conferences, seminars, fundraising events, launch parties and community events.

Remember: the success of any initiative often lies in the hands of a champion, who must start, drive and promote it. If you decide to be the champion of a healthy catering initiative in your workplace, you will need to take the first simple steps (outlined below) to develop appropriate policies and procedures, and continue to drive and promote them.

Step 1: Getting your organisation on board

Before you get started, seek support from your employer and other key people in your organisation. To do this, you will need to present them with your organisation's current catering practice and the benefits of introducing healthier catering.

Identify current catering practice and what changes may be needed

Discuss the scope of your current catering options with colleagues and the people who provide food in your workplace. Record what types of food and drinks are currently served, and identify possible organisational and attitudinal barriers to change.

Seek support from management

It is important to convince senior management in your workplace that healthy catering is important! Try presenting the benefits of healthy catering as below.

“Employers who promote healthy eating report the following effects on their workforce:

- improved health
- increased productivity
- lower rates of absenteeism and quicker return to work after illness
- increased physical capacity, energy levels and mental alertness among older employees
- improved morale and working atmosphere
- reduced stress and anxiety
- a positive corporate image.”¹

Form a healthy catering working group

Ask key people from across your organisation to join a healthy catering working group. Include people who already order and prepare food for meetings and events.

This working group can decide what changes need to be made and create an action plan. It can also decide how to best communicate changes to staff, act as a forum for sharing ideas and receive ongoing feedback from staff about the policy once it is implemented.

Our *Caterers’ kit* may help you to form this group, develop a policy and present your case to senior management. Speaking to an external consultant, such as an accredited practising dietitian, may also help you to develop a policy and present your case to senior management. See *Want to know more?* for contact information.

Develop goals and objectives

Set realistic goals, consult with appropriate people and identify practical solutions to help you overcome any barriers to change that you may encounter.

Step 2: Developing the policy

Consider whether or not your workplace healthy catering policy fits in with existing employee health and wellness policies. It may be also possible that existing policies could be changed to incorporate healthy catering ideals.

¹ British Heart Foundation. Health at work: Benefits for employers. London: British Heart Foundation, 2010. Available at: www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/eating_well_at_work/resources.aspx. Accessed 13 July 2010.

You may also want to consider making this an Employee Wellness Policy and include the promotion of physical activity, incidental exercise and stress management.

When you develop a new policy, you should consider the following:

- what do you want to achieve? e.g. incremental change or an overhaul
- who will champion the policy?
- who will be responsible for its implementation and monitoring?
- how will the policy be implemented and when?
- how to get maximum adherence to the policy
- what action will be taken when the policy is not adhered to?
- how will the policy be evaluated?²

Once the policy is finalised, it will need to be approved by your organisation's management board or committee.

Step 3: Selecting a caterer

Your caterer may be a local deli or snack bar, self-employed, from a conference venue or a large foodservice operation.

If you decide not to implement a workplace healthy catering policy, you may still need to choose one or more external caterers to prepare your food and drinks. To help the caterer create healthier menus, give them a copy of our *Caterer's kit*. You can access the kit at www.heartfoundation.org.au/HealthyEating.

Once the caterer has given you a menu, you may need to negotiate a few simple changes or use the *Caterers' information and guidelines*. For example, scones may usually come served with jam and cream, so ask if they can be served with 100% fruit spread and ricotta cheese instead. Be aware that these changes may cause extra work for the caterer.

If you decide to develop and implement a workplace healthy catering policy, you can adapt our example workplace healthy catering policy to suit your organisation.

When you talk with each caterer, explain how important healthy eating is to your organisation and give the caterer a copy of your workplace healthy catering policy. This information will help them to create appropriate menu options for your organisation.

Step 4: Serving healthier food and drinks

Providing healthier food and drinks can be easy – and delicious! A few simple changes can make a big difference.

² Healthway. Health Policies. Guidelines for Healthway Sponsored Organisations. Western Australia: Healthway, n.d. Available at: www.healthway.wa.gov.au/default.aspx?MenuID=713. Accessed 12 July 2010.

Aim to serve a variety of foods including:

- plenty of vegetables and fruit, including dried fruit
- wholegrain breakfast cereals, pasta and noodles; wholegrain or wholemeal bread; and brown rice
- legumes; pulses, including canned beans, dried peas, dried beans and chickpeas; and lentils
- lean meats, fish and poultry with skin removed; try to limit processed meats, such as salami and sausages
- reduced, low or no fat dairy products (no cream), such as milk, cheese and yoghurt
- boiled, poached or scrambled (no cream or butter) eggs
- spreads and margarines made from canola, sunflower or olive oil instead of butter
- oven-baked, grilled, boiled, stewed or poached foods; limit deep fried foods
- foods with no added salt, such as plain, unsalted nuts.

Try to limit sugary, salty and fatty snack foods, such as party pies, spring rolls, crisps, cakes, pastries and sweet biscuits.

Ideally healthier foods should be well promoted, displayed in a prominent and attractive manner, and if possible, priced competitively.

Want to know more?

For more information about healthy workplace catering, practical tips and ideas, visit:

- www.heartfoundation.org.au/HealthyEating for:
 - *A Healthier Serve: The Heart Foundation's Guide to Healthier Catering* – a handy guide to help you serve healthier food and drinks when catering for a group or organisation
 - *The right ingredient* – a practical and informative booklet that gives advice on choosing healthier ingredients and cooking methods
 - templates to help you develop a workplace nutrition policy for catered functions and internal cafeterias/canteens
- www.gofor2and5.com.au for healthy recipes
- www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?PageID=2145878768 for sample catering and recipe ideas from the Dietitians Association of Australia.

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