

INFORMAL FOOD SUPPLY

Examples include:

- shared birthday or special occasion celebrations
- shared morning teas
- after-work drinks
- food pantries and honesty boxes
- fruit bowls
- free, discounted or subsidised food provided during a shift or to take home
- home-grown produce swaps.

Is informal food in the workplace really an issue?

It doesn't have to be! Informal food supply within a workplace is often an important part of workplace culture and provides a social setting for employees to get together. Informal food supply can be an opportunity to provide employees with a balance of occasional (or 'sometimes') food, and healthy everyday food.

Informal food supply only becomes an issue for the health and wellbeing of your employees if it is too frequent or does not have a balance of healthy and occasional foods. For example, weekly morning teas that only provide cake and biscuits make it difficult for employees to make ongoing healthy choices.

In general, we think of cakes and other sweet treats (such as biscuits) as celebratory foods, or foods for special occasions. Next time you are organising an event, consider whether these types of foods are really necessary, or whether you could reduce some of these celebratory foods and offer healthy options as well.

What is 'informal food supply'?

Informal food supply refers to more spontaneous or social food-related settings and activities in the workplace.



What can a workplace do?

There are many ways you can improve the informal food supply culture in your workplace – here are some examples and suggestions that may be helpful.

- Fruit bowl / yoghurt / honesty pantry
 - Have a roster for stocking a cost-recovery fruit bowl in your tea room.
 - Offer yoghurts or cheese and crackers for sale in the fridge – these are a good snack option for employees. Have a designated person or a roster to maintain a supply of these foods.
 - Provide fruit and nut snack packs for sale.

Friday night drinks/ social events

- These are important occasions for networking, enhancing morale and building and creating team relationships. Providing healthier food and drink options at these events is easy and achievable.
 - Offer plain or sparkling water or other non-alcoholic options for those not wanting to drink alcohol. Reduce the amount of sugar-sweetened drinks provided as non-alcoholic alternatives.
 - Encourage employees to drink safely by following the Australian Alcohol Consumption guidelines (2009).
 - Always provide food when alcohol is being offered. Consider offering the following healthy foods:
 - cheese and dips with plain rice crackers, water crackers or vegetable sticks for dipping
 - fruit platters
 - sushi
 - sandwiches and wraps.
 - Limit pastry and fried or fatty options, e.g. party pies, crisps, savoyes.

Birthday cakes / morning teas

- Celebrations and social gatherings are an important part of workplace culture. There are some great ways to ensure that this does not become a barrier to employees who want to make healthy choices at work.
 - When organising a morning tea, ensure that fruit is provided as an option.
 - Consider providing healthier sweet options, for example, banana bread, blueberry muffins or carrot cake.
 - Limit cakes and biscuits with cream filling or icing.
 - Consider how often your workplace has morning teas; if they are too frequent, this could become problematic for both productivity and health.
- Free or discounted food for employees while on shift or to take home.

In some industries (for example, food manufacturing, distribution, retail and hospitality), it is common for employees to receive food to take home or consume on site at no cost. This is not usually a problem for the health of your employees and can be considered a 'bonus' that you can provide as an incentive or to improve morale. However, it is worth considering whether receiving free or discounted food is in the best interests of your employees.

- If your employees receive less healthy food options to consume or take home, consider limiting the amount or volume of the options that are provided.



Food at meetings

- If you have regular weekly meetings where cake or biscuits are informally provided, try alternating between healthier and less healthy options. For example, you could try having cake one week and sandwiches the next. Other healthy ideas include:
 - sushi
 - dip and crackers or vegetable sticks for dipping
 - fruit plate
 - cheese and crackers
 - dried fruit and nuts
 - savoury or fruit muffins.

Employee gifts and rewards

- When organising gifts or rewards for employees, consider:
 - non-food gifts, such as vouchers for massage, sports shops or outdoor shops
 - fruit and vegetable or other healthy food hampers
 - dinner vouchers.