



These recommendations will help you plan healthier meals and snacks. Nutrition standards are provided for certain foods that may contain excessive calories, sodium, added sugars and/or saturated fat. Nutrition standards for meals are offered as a benchmark to use if your vendor/food provider (caterer, restaurant, hotel, etc.) provides detailed nutrition information. You may want to share some of the guidance provided here with your vendor(s).

See [Glossary](#) for definitions of food and nutrition terms.

## Beverages

Many beverage choices are available, with varying calorie and sugar content. Beverages marketed with words like vitamin, herbal, natural, power, energy, etc. can contain just as much sugar and calories as a regular soda. Compare nutrition information and choose wisely. You may need to use a stair-step approach to gradually eliminate full-calorie sugar-sweetened beverages in your workplace.

### General Guidance

- Ensure that clean, cool water is always available at no cost.
- Present water as an attractive and appealing option. Garnish pitchers of water with citrus or cucumber slices or provide citrus wedges in a bowl.
- Offer sparkling water instead of soda.
- Offer decaffeinated as well as caffeinated coffee and tea.
- Serve coffee and tea unsweetened. Provide fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk or non-dairy creamer instead of half and half or whole milk.
- Offer juices that provide more beneficial nutrients, like orange and grapefruit.

### Nutrition Standards for Beverages

- Water (plain, sparkling and flavored) – no more than 10 calories per serving
- Fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk and milk alternatives (soy, almond, etc.) – no more than 130 calories per 8 fl. oz.
- Juice – 100% fruit or vegetable juice (or juice and water)
  - No added sugars/sweeteners (except non-nutritive sweeteners)
  - No more than 120 calories per 8 fl. oz. (preferred serving size), 150 calories per 10 fl. oz., or 180 calories per 12 fl. oz.
- Other beverages – no more than 10 calories per serving

## Snacks

Providing healthier snacks is a great way to help improve dietary quality in your workplace. You may also want to consider not providing between-meal snacks, including food at meeting breaks.

### Healthier Snack Ideas

- Fresh fruit – apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, grapes, melon, oranges, pineapple, etc.
- Fruit tray or fruit kabobs
- Apple sauce, unsweetened
- Dried fruits (with little or no added sugars) – apples, apricots, blueberries, cranberries, raisins
- Fresh vegetables – bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cherry tomatoes, edamame, snap peas, zucchini
- Whole-grain crackers
- Baked whole-grain pita chips
- Dips – if needed, try hummus, salsa, guacamole, bean dip, nut butter, baba ganoush, yogurt and other “light” dips
- Roasted or raw nuts (unsalted or very lightly salted) – almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- “Build Your Own Trail Mix” bar – dried fruit, unsweetened if available (raisins, blueberries, dates); nuts (almonds, peanuts, pecans, walnuts); seeds (pumpkin, sunflower); cereal (whole grain); no chocolate or candy
- Yogurt (fat-free/low-fat)
- Pretzels or hot pretzels cut in pieces (unsalted or lightly salted)
- Light popcorn (unsalted or lightly salted)
- Rice cakes – look for whole-grain and/or brown rice
- Graham crackers (preferably whole-grain)
- Whole-wheat bagels – mini or cut in fourths, with non-fat/low-fat cream cheese
- Cheese (non-fat/low-fat/light) in individual portion packs



#### Nutrition Standards for Snacks (except plain nuts and nut/fruit mixes)

- No more than 200 calories per label serving
- Choose items with the lowest amount of sodium – no more than 240 mg of sodium per label serving (preferably no more than 140 mg)
- Zero g *trans* fat per label serving and no products containing partially hydrogenated oils
- No more than 1 g of saturated fat
- No candy (sugar-free mints and gum are OK)
- No regular chips (baked chips and pretzels are OK)

#### Nutrition Standards for Plain Nuts and Nut/Fruit Mixes

- Preferred serving size for plain nuts is 1 oz. but no more than 1.5 oz.
- Choose products with the lowest amount of sodium – no more than 140 mg of sodium per label serving

## Meals

A meal is a combination of foods and beverages intended for breakfast, lunch or dinner. It includes two or more items from recommended food groups served in combination (e.g., lean meat + vegetable + fruit + whole-grain bread). At least one item should be a fruit or vegetable.

### Food Groups

- Grains – bread, cereal, rice and pasta
- Fruits and vegetables
- Dairy – milk, yogurt and cheese
- Protein – meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts

### General Guidance

- Ensure healthier options are attractively presented, well-lit and appealing in name and appearance. On buffets, place healthier options in prominent positions at the start of the line, where they are more likely to be seen and chosen.
- Provide reasonable (not large) portions of foods and beverages. Cut large portions in halves or quarters when possible (e.g., bagels, sandwiches). If meat is served, a portion ideally should be 3 oz. and no more than 6 oz.
- Ask for foods to be prepared with minimal salt, if salt is needed at all.
- Offer at least one fruit and/or vegetable serving every time food is served. Aim for filling half the plate with vegetables and fruits.
- When serving appetizers, select those that provide a serving of fruit, vegetables, whole grains or legumes.
- If multiple entrées are offered (such as on a buffet), make one entrée fish (preferably oily fish). Include a vegetarian option when possible.
- If serving salad as the entrée (instead of a starter or side), be sure to tell the vendor so they provide the appropriate amount.
- Provide dessert only for a special occasion dinner such as a gala. If a dessert is required, fresh fruit and fruit-based desserts are better choices. See [Healthier Dessert Ideas in Receptions, Galas and Special Events](#) section.
- When serving meals buffet-style, use smaller plates, which requires attendees to get up from the table and move around more often.

- Ask attendees in advance about any special dietary needs or restrictions (vegetarian/vegan, food allergies, etc.) and plan accordingly.

### Avoid serving:

- High-sugar breakfast cereals
- Bakery items, biscuits, corn bread, croissants, Danishes, muffins, pastries, etc.
- High-sodium, high-fat meats such as bacon, sausage or ham
- Heavy, high-fat sauces such as Bordelaise, Hollandaise, Alfredo, cheese sauce, sour cream sauce
- Butter
- Fried foods
- Regular chips
- Dishes with cheese as a key ingredient, such as au gratin potatoes, cheese soufflé or macaroni and cheese
- Cookies and desserts

### Nutrition Standards for Meals

- No more than 700 calories
- No more than 800 mg sodium (preferably no more than 525 mg)
- No more than 5 g saturated fat
- No more than 105 mg cholesterol
- Less than 0.5 g *trans* fat and no products containing partially hydrogenated oils
- At least 2 servings (1-1.5 cups) of vegetables and/or fruits

*Nutrition standards are provided as a benchmark to use if your food provider makes nutrition information available. Not all providers supply this, but continue to request it so they'll know it's needed.*

## Receptions, Galas and Special Events

In general, follow the relevant guidance in this toolkit related to meals.

### Healthier Reception Food Ideas

- Fresh vegetables with low-fat dressing, salsa or tofu dip
- Roasted, grilled and/or marinated vegetables
- Fresh fruits (grapes, melon and berries are common)
- Nuts (unsalted or very lightly salted and unsweetened) – almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts are acceptable
- Grilled or broiled chicken tenders without skin
- Miniature meatballs made with lean meat
- Skewers or kabobs with lean meat and vegetables
- Broiled, grilled, roasted or poached seafood
- Boiled shrimp with cocktail sauce
- Vegetable spring or summer rolls (fresh, not fried egg rolls)
- Small cubes of cheese (no more than 3/4" square) paired with berries or grapes and whole grain crackers or bread
- Hummus (variety of flavors) with whole grain crackers and veggie crudité
- Caprese salad (tomato, low-fat mozzarella and basil)
- Guacamole with whole grain chips, baby carrots and celery
- Bruschetta (toppings may include tomato, other veggies, beans, herbs, mozzarella)
- Stuffed mushroom caps (stuffed with roasted vegetables instead of cheese or meat)

Desserts should only be served for special occasions, such as gala events. Desserts are not needed at most lunches, dinners and receptions. If a dessert is required, fresh fruit and fruit-based desserts are better choices. If you use traditional desserts, also offer fruit as a substitute/alternative choice. If nutrition information is available, a dessert ideally should have no more than 200 calories per serving.

### Healthier Dessert Ideas for Galas and Special Events

- Baked apples
- Poached pears
- Grilled peaches
- Mini fruit tarts (no more than 2" diameter)
- Angel food cake with fresh fruit compote
- Fresh fruit medley in a martini glass with a sprig of mint
- Fruit skewers
- Fruit sorbet
- Dark chocolate-dipped strawberries
- Miniature or "shooter" desserts (small portions of a traditional dessert)
- Small squares of cake (no more than 2" square) paired with fresh fruit or berries



## Action Plan for On-site Meals

1. Identify vendors/food providers (caterers, restaurants, grocery stores) in your area that are possible options for in-house catering.
2. Set up a 15-minute informational interview. Explain that your organization is committed to creating a culture of health and that you want to learn about their healthier menu options. Ask these five 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 – the good and the bad (if any)?
  - Can you accommodate special requests?
  - Can you provide calorie and sodium content for your menu offerings?

These questions will help you get a sense of who is willing to work with you in providing healthier meals. Don't worry if they can't provide calorie and/or sodium information; many vendors don't have this information yet. But this information is important, so please keep asking for it. Continuing requests will motivate businesses to provide it as soon as they can.

3. Select the vendor(s) you think can best meet your needs.
4. Plan an in-person meeting with the primary contact. You will likely need 1–1.5 hours for this meeting. Discussion items should include:
  - Review the Food and Beverage Guidance offered in this toolkit. You may want to send them the [\*Guidance for Caterers and Food Vendors\*](#) in advance so they can identify possible offerings.

- Identify the menu offerings that may be acceptable and discuss ingredients, possible substitutions, etc. For example, ask if they'll substitute a fresh fruit cup for chips.
  - Ask if the vendor can do a taste testing for a small group from your office. Include 3–5 people so you get a few opinions on the acceptability of the food. It's important for the food to taste good. People may say that a particular food item doesn't taste exactly as it used to, and that's OK. It may take a little time for some people's taste buds to adjust to healthier food.
  - Discuss any other important issues, such as minimum order, advance notice required, cost, delivery time, supplies provided (napkins, utensils, etc.).
5. Share the vendor's contact information and list of acceptable menu items with other staff who are responsible for planning and ordering meals for meetings.

### Helpful Tips

- Check in with your contact periodically to see if new or seasonal menu items are being offered.
- Order less than you think you need, especially for items in bulk trays rather than individual portions.
- You may go through a trial-and-error process with each vendor, so document and share your experiences (with the vendor and other staff) when possible.
- If a food vendor is not meeting your needs, explore other options.

## Menu Plan for Off-site Events

When planning plated meals or buffets at hotels, restaurants and conference centers, you'll probably need to customize the existing offerings, so be sure to plan far enough in advance. Let the catering manager and/or chef know you want to work together to create healthier meals. Some chefs are willing to get creative and create dishes that aren't on the menu if they have some guidance and enough lead time.

### General Guidance

- If served, bread products should be whole grain.
- Do not serve butter.
- Provide at least one fruit or vegetable with every meal.
- Offer fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk or non-dairy creamer for coffee and tea instead of cream or half & half.
- Serve water in pitchers instead of bottled water.
- No regular soft drinks or sugar-sweetened beverages.
- No candy or candy bowls in meeting rooms.

### Sample Continental Breakfast

#### Beverages

- Orange juice and grapefruit juice
- Regular and decaf coffee
- Selection of teas including some herbal/decaf
- Fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk as a beverage and for coffee and cold cereal
- A few diet soft drinks

#### Breads

- Whole-grain toast or bagels (small size, if available, or request that they be cut into halves or fourths) and assorted jams (or preserves)
- No bakery items, biscuits, croissants, Danishes, muffins, pastries, etc.



#### Cereals

- Assorted cold cereals (whole-grain and non-sugared/non-frosted)
- Oatmeal
- Toppings served on the side – dried fruit, nuts (almonds, pecans, walnuts), spices (cinnamon, nutmeg), brown sugar, honey

#### Fruit

- Bananas
- Sliced/cut-up fruit and berries

#### Yogurt

- Assorted flavors including plain if available
- Non-fat, low-fat and/or light varieties of regular or Greek yogurt

## Lunch and Dinner

### Salad

Salads are a good option for either a starter or an entrée, and they're an easy way to fit in more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Hotels usually have a wide variety of salad selections. If planning a buffet, consider a "build your own salad" station with a variety of toppings.

- Choose salads with interesting ingredients such as various types of greens, dried fruit, fresh fruit, avocado, nuts, seeds, red and yellow peppers, beans, peas, and whole grains such as corn, quinoa or bulgur.
- Cheese is OK when a small quantity is used as a garnish on a plated salad. Avoid serving cheese on a buffet.
- Avoid high-sodium ingredients such as bacon, croutons, olives and capers.
- Salad dressings:
  - Vinaigrette-type dressings are typically a healthier choice and come in many flavors such as balsamic, pomegranate, orange, red wine, cider, lemon, champagne, etc.
  - In addition to one or two dressings off the menu, ask for oil and vinegar on the table.
  - Avoid heavy, creamy dressings.
  - Request all salad dressings be served on the side.

### Entrée

- If selecting more than one entrée, try to make an oily fish one of the options. You may also want to offer a vegetarian option.
- Grilled, roasted, broiled, baked or poached are usually the healthiest preparation methods.
- If the entrée includes a sauce, ask what the sauce contains. Request that sauces and gravies be made without too much sodium. Also avoid heavy sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients.

### Vegetable

- Always provide at least one vegetable side.
- Choose a variety of colors and take advantage of seasonal veggies.
- Common menu offerings include asparagus, spinach, carrots, beets, broccoli, yellow squash, mushrooms, Brussels sprouts, peas, corn, sweet potatoes and potatoes.
- Roasted, grilled, steamed and sautéed (in healthy oil) are healthier preparation methods. Avoid heavy preparations such as fried, creamed, casserole, au gratin, tempura, twice-baked (potatoes).
- Avoid heavy sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, cheese, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients.
- Request that vegetables be seasoned with herbs, spices, salt-free seasonings, flavored vinegar or a squeeze of lemon or lime instead of salt.

### Other Sides

- Whole grains such as quinoa, barley, wheat berry, bulgur (tabouleh), freekeh, couscous
- Beans and legumes
- Rice (black, brown, red, wild, mixed)
- Pasta (whole grain)

### Dessert

- Fresh fruit, fruit medley, mixed berries
- Choose a variety of colors and take advantage of seasonal fruits.

## Breaks and Snacks

- Fresh fruit – apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, grapes, melon, oranges, pineapple
- Fruit tray or fruit kabobs
- Fresh vegetables – bell peppers, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cherry tomatoes, edamame, snap peas, zucchini
- Dips – if needed, try hummus, salsa, guacamole, bean dip, nut butter, baba ganoush, yogurt and other “light” dips
- Yogurt (low-fat/non-fat)
- Yogurt and fruit parfait (small)
- Dried fruits (with little or no added sugars) – apples, apricots, blueberries, cranberries, raisins
- Roasted or raw nuts (unsalted or very lightly salted) – almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- “Build Your Own Trail Mix” bar – dried fruit, unsweetened if available (raisins, blueberries, dates); nuts (almonds, peanuts, pecans, walnuts); seeds (pumpkin, sunflower); cereal (whole grain); no chocolate or candy

