



Guidelines for Healthy Meetings

The role of food choices and physical activity is crucial in the prevention of obesity and many chronic and debilitating diseases. Employers can educate people to make healthy food choices by providing healthy foods at meetings and other events. Providing participants with a physical activity break at longer meetings and events is a health benefit and will also improve the ability to focus on the topic being addressed.

The following are general food guidelines to use when planning meals for meetings and other events:

Always offer:

- Lower fat foods
- Reduced or fewer calorie foods
- Smaller portion sizes (e.g. bagels cut in halves, small cookies).
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Low-fat milk (1% or less)
- Pitchers of water

Consider:

- 100% fruit or vegetable juice, seltzer, or iced tea (unsweetened) instead of soft drinks
- A vegetarian option
- A healthier sweet such as fresh fruit, small cookies, small servings of sorbet, or yogurt
- Eliminating heavy desserts after serving meals – serve fresh fruit, a fruit crisp or cobbler, or small cookies. Offering a choice of a heavy dessert (large slice of cake, etc.) and a light one (fruit) often presents a difficult choice for guests. If you only have the light choice, very few people will notice the difference.
- Asking for samples ahead of time from the food service vendor. Many food service professionals now have some familiarity with healthier food preparation options and are willing to accommodate requests for changes to their usual fare.
- Adding a space to indicate food allergies and dietary restrictions to meeting registration forms

Food Suggestions for Breaks (am & pm):

- Raw vegetables with low-fat dip
- Low-fat yogurt
- Bagels with low-fat cream cheese or jams (generally lower in fat and calories than cream cheese).
Serve mini bagels or have the bagels cut in halves or quarters
- Whole-grain muffins (cut in half if not serving mini muffins) and whole-grain breads instead of Danish, croissants or doughnuts
- Pretzels, hot pretzels (cut in pieces) with mustard
- Lightly seasoned popcorn
- Graham crackers or fig newtons
- Dried fruit or trail mix
- Fresh fruit - whole or cut up (with a yogurt dip)
- Low-fat milk or evaporated skim milk for coffee

Food Suggestions for Lunch/Dinner

- Raw vegetables with low-fat dip and fresh fruits
- Soups that are vegetarian broth-based or creamed from pureed vegetables or evaporated skim milk instead of heavy cream
- Salads with low-fat salad dressing on the side
- Salads with dark green lettuces, spinach, beans, peas, grilled lean meat, reduced fat or low-fat cheeses
- Use a combination of low-fat mayonnaise and plain yogurt for potato salads, etc., and dress such salads lightly
- Include whole-grain breads and rolls
- Include low-fat mayonnaise and mustard as a condiment for sandwiches, or cranberry sauce if you're offering turkey
- If sandwiches are made ahead of time, have them presented in halves
- Make pasta dishes (lasagna, pizza) with vegetables, low-fat cheeses (part skim mozzarella, part skim ricotta) or serve pasta with tomato or other vegetable based sauces
- Limit meat servings to a 4-ounce portion and provide plenty of low-fat, low calorie side dishes
- Serve at least two vegetables with each meal, and avoid butter or cream sauces
- Provide raw vegetables, fruit or pretzels instead of potato chips or french fries
- Include fresh fruit or fruit salad as dessert
- Avoid fried foods
- Baked potatoes with low-fat or vegetable toppings on the side

Physical Activity Guidelines

- If possible, choose a location for your meeting where participants can easily and safely take a walk. If you are holding an overnight meeting, choose a place where participants can walk to dinner, evening entertainment, shopping, etc. rather than drive. Provide participants with maps of the area showing good walking routes.
- Choose a hotel that has good fitness facilities - a fitness room, a pool, etc. Include information about these facilities in materials you send to participants.
- Organize an early morning physical activity opportunity. The easiest thing to organize is a morning walk. Or, you can arrange for an early morning low impact fitness class.
- Encourage participants to take the stairs. Place signs near the elevators telling people where the stairs are.
- Consider telling people that the dress code for the meeting is casual - this allows people to move around freely.
- Encourage networking by suggesting people take a walk together and talk about their common interests.
- Schedule brief activity breaks in the morning and afternoon. Have participants stand up and walk in place or have someone lead a stretch break. People will be better able to pay attention to the rest of the meeting.