Promoting Healthy Eating at Work

A Policy Resource Guide

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kchealthykids
ABOUT MID-AMERICA COALITION ON HEALTH CARE

Mid-America Coalition on Health Care (MACHC) is a not-for-profit business coalition whose mission is to: improve the health of employees and their families; promote employee and community wellness and illness prevention; develop strategies and initiatives for containing business health care costs; and generate and communicate health care information to the community. MACHC is also a founding partner of Building a Healthier Heartland, a coalition that promotes policy, systems, and environmental changes to address obesity using sustainable, innovative, and replicable evidence-based efforts.

• To learn more about MACHC go to www.machc.org.
• To learn more about Building a Healthier Heartland, go to www.bhh-kc.org.

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**USING THIS GUIDE**

*Promoting Healthy Eating at Work: A Policy Resource Guide* was created to support organizations in their efforts to promote healthy eating to employees. It illustrates steps employers of any size can take to improve their organizations’ food environment, which might include cafeterias, onsite distribution of fresh produce, vending services, and meetings and events. Through case studies, this guide highlights best practices in the Greater Kansas City region.

Turning the tide on the epidemic of obesity will require change, both in individual behaviors and in workplace policies, as organizations create environments that support healthy habits. We hope the information and sample strategies presented here will help you change your workplace environment to align messages about healthy eating and support employees in making healthier food choices.

This guide is the first comprehensive worksite food policy in the region. As a result, we regret any omission of worthy approaches and local resources. While the resources and case studies are evidence-based, their inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by the authors, sponsors or review committee.

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RATIONALE FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING AT WORK

INTRODUCTION

Currently, in the United States, 72 million adults are overweight or obese. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says obesity is at epidemic proportions and is one of the “most urgent health challenges facing our country today.”

Healthy employees are more productive. They miss less work, have fewer health care costs, experience fewer injuries from accidents, and have better morale. The rapid rate at which obesity has increased is cause for concern among employers because of increasing health care costs and costs due to lost workdays.

Consider this:
• 27% of the rise in healthcare costs is associated with increases in obesity rates.2,3
• Obese employees cost American private companies $45 billion per year in medical expenditures and related productivity losses.4
• The national average total health benefit cost per employee in 2007 was $7,983.5
• Each year, an overweight employee costs his or her employer an additional $450 to $2,500 in medical expenses and absences.6
• Obese employees have higher rates of absenteeism: approximately 0.85 to 5.1 more days of missed work than normal weight employees.7,8
• An employer can save approximately $350 per employee per year just by keeping healthy employees at low risk.9,10

Poor diet and physical inactivity are the two most important factors contributing to the epidemic of overweight and obesity among men, women, and children in our society. Even for people who are not overweight, poor diet is often associated with major causes of morbidity and mortality, according to the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010.11

Changing Americans’ eating habits to focus more deliberately on “what and how much they eat and drink” (along with increasing physical activity) can help them attain and maintain a healthy weight and reduce the health risks associated with overweight and obesity (e.g., chronic disease, and premature death) as well as reduce our collective health care costs.12

On average, Americans spend at least one-third or more of their day at work. They consume meals, beverages or snacks in worksite cafeterias, from vending machines, and at meetings, conferences, and other events. When employers implement strategies to improve the food environment and offer healthier choices, they can influence and improve their employees’ diets, and ultimately, their health.

For example, diabetes is a chronic condition that drives up health care costs for employers. The number of working age adults with diabetes and pre-diabetes is increasing. This is largely due to the increase in obesity of our population. Through behavior change that includes making healthier food choices, weight loss, and exercise, pre-diabetes can be reversed before it progresses to diabetes which makes a compelling case for employers to promote healthy behaviors at work.13
IMPORTANT CONCEPTS FOR MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE

• Healthy eating is crucial in the prevention and management of overweight and obesity but it also can help improve productivity in the workplace.¹⁴

• Worksite wellness programs can ameliorate the obesity health care crisis by helping employees change their behavior and make food healthier choices. Evidence strongly suggests that providing free advice or strategies for reducing dietary fat intake and cholesterol is effective.¹⁵

• Employers have a distinct advantage when it comes to promoting healthier behaviors because they “share many qualities with the community at large (numerous people frequently interacting with one another, close proximity of people).”¹⁶

• Organizations can implement policy, systems, and environmental initiatives that make healthy food more available, more affordable, and more appealing. For instance, they can:
  – Promote healthier foods in their cafeterias
  – Offer Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs or farmers markets to increase employees’ access to fresh fruits and vegetables
  – Stock vending machines with more selections of healthy foods and beverages
  – Implement a policy to serve only healthy foods and beverages at meetings and special events¹⁷

RESOURCES

• **Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity.** These PowerPoint slides created by CDC can be downloaded and tailored for your use.

• **The Community Guide – Obesity Prevention and Control: Worksite Programs.** Developed by the CDC, this site describes worksite nutrition and physical activity programs designed to improve health related behaviors and outcomes. These programs may include information, education, policy, systems and environmental changes to address health risk behaviors. [http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html)

• **The WellFeds Campaign: Federal Employees Active and Healthy…Working Well!** This WellFeds Worksite Wellness Program manual is a start-up guide for agencies interested in establishing a worksite wellness program.
  [http://www.healthierchicago.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BFB151B0B-05EB-4530-8460-225CAEAC3E99%7D](http://www.healthierchicago.org/index.asp?Type=B_BASIC&SEC=%7BFB151B0B-05EB-4530-8460-225CAEAC3E99%7D)

• **Worksite Wellness Implementation Guide.** Based on the Worksite Resource Kit to Prevent Obesity and Related Chronic Disease, by the Wisconsin Partnership for Activity and Nutrition, this guide makes the business case for worksite wellness.

• **WorkWell Missouri Tool Kit.** Developed by the University of Missouri Extension to assist businesses in starting up or enhancing their worksite wellness programs, the tool kit focuses on reducing health risks for chronic diseases.
  [http://extension.missouri.edu/healthylife/worksite.htm](http://extension.missouri.edu/healthylife/worksite.htm)
REFERENCES


PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING IN WORKSITE CAFETERIAS

INTRODUCTION

American workers spend a major portion of their day “on the job,” so it’s no surprise that many organizations, large and small, provide subsidized cafeterias and snack bars. Employers can encourage employees to make healthier food choices by adopting evidence-based strategies and policies to improve the “food culture” in worksite cafeterias.\textsuperscript{1, 2} Strategies proven to increase the purchase of healthier foods include: limiting the availability of less healthy items; providing menu and calorie labeling; and marketing healthier choices through signage.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

- Healthy foods must be readily accessible and affordable in worksite settings.\textsuperscript{3, 4}
- Providing menu and calorie labeling in cafeterias, as well as signs that identify and promote healthy food choices, increases consumption of healthier foods.\textsuperscript{5, 6}
- Discounts or cafeteria specials on healthier menu items increase the purchase of healthy foods in worksite cafeterias.\textsuperscript{7}
- “Nutrient-dense” foods prepared in a way that reduces the added solid fats, sugars, starches, and sodium called for in many recipes are the best bets in your cafeteria.\textsuperscript{8}
- Reducing portion sizes by preparing and serving smaller amounts also encourages healthier eating by helping employees consume smaller amounts of foods and beverages, and consequently, fewer calories.\textsuperscript{9}
- The average American adult consumes 400 calories a day in beverages alone. Low- or no-calorie options like unsweetened coffee or tea, 100% fruit juice, low-fat milk or water limit excess calorie intake and help employees maintain a healthy weight.\textsuperscript{10}
- Limiting the availability of less healthy food options to help employees reduce the amount they eat of these items must be a part of any comprehensive plan to promote healthier choices and better nutrition.\textsuperscript{11}
- Employers who have strong partnerships with their food vendors may have better success at promoting healthier eating in the workplace.\textsuperscript{12}

WHAT ARE NUTRIENT- DENSE FOODS?

A food is more nutrient-dense when the level of nutrients it contains is high in relationship to the number of calories the food contains. Nutrient-dense foods include:

- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat milk products
- Lean meats
- Poultry
- Seafood
- Eggs
- Beans
- Peas
- Nuts
- Seeds
HOW TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING AT WORK

• Partner with food vendors to integrate nutrient-dense food choices into your cafeteria. Strategies could include adjusting procurement policies, developing promotions to increase sales of healthier options, sharing healthy recipes, and using lower-calorie cooking methods.
• Place healthier items so they are easily accessible. For example, put the salad bar in the middle of your cafeteria to increase accessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables.
• Subsidize healthier choices in your cafeteria by offering incentives or discount pricing for those items. Strategies include punch cards or “every 10th healthy item” is free.
• Price unhealthy choices strategically to discourage employees from buying items that are high in fat, sodium or sugar.
• Implement policies to limit the availability of unhealthy choices, such as candy or sugary beverages, in the cafeteria.
• Provide water and ice machines so employees can have ready access to eco-friendly clean water versus costly, bottled water.
• Post nutrition content in a variety of ways.
• Provide a refrigerator/freezer and a microwave that employees can use so they can bring lunches or prepare healthy snacks and beverages at work.
• Develop a communications strategy to encourage employees to choose healthier foods and improve their daily diet. Include information about worksite support programs and the benefits of good nutrition.
• Help senior leadership understand the financial burden of obesity and gain their buy-in for increasing healthy eating choices in worksite cafeterias.
• Recognize that you can’t tackle everything at once. Instead, start with the small changes you can make and promote the successes to your company’s leadership. For example, one leading company in the health industry provides free soda to its employees. Changing this practice will require time and a culture shift.

CASE STUDIES

Partnering to Promote Change
American Century Investments

American Century Investments, a small- to mid-sized employer in the financial industry, built a successful partnership with their cafeteria vendor. At an initial meeting, they found the vendor was open to suggestions and ideas about ways to help employees eat better in their “Market Place” food court. As a result, nutritional information was posted to the company’s intranet site and printed in a book that was placed in each cafeteria. These strategies allow employees to plan ahead to make healthy choices. For customers selecting the “Market Fit Lunch,” a menu item that meets specific nutritional guidelines, the cafeteria offers a 5% discount.

The company’s health management team also worked with their food vendor to align cafeteria offerings with their health messages and wellness initiatives. For instance, during Heart Month (February), the cafeteria highlighted menu choices that met certain heart-health criteria. Low-sodium and reduced-fat options were featured and employees received a 25% discount on these entrees. The vendor also provided fruit for a nutrition-based program called “Fruit-in-a-Cube” to encourage healthy snacking. Participating employees picked up eight pieces of fruit each week during the six-week program. By the end, they had eaten approximately 16,500 pieces of fruit!
**Simple Changes Make a Difference**  
*Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics*

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics (CMH) is a mid- to large-sized health care employer with a predominately female (80%) employee population. In their cafeteria, employees had access to a wide range of food choices, but many were high in calories and fat and low in nutritional value. This made it difficult for employees to make healthy choices.

Because so many of CMH’s employees were eating meals in the hospital cafeteria, the health management team decided to promote healthier food options. The team worked closely with their cafeteria vendor, who made simple changes to improve employees’ food choices on a daily basis. Nutritional information was posted in the cafeteria and made available on the hospital intranet. Prices on sugary drinks were adjusted, making them more expensive than diet beverages. The salad bar became the centerpiece of the cafeteria, with fresh, low-calorie, and, when possible, locally grown fruits and vegetables. High-calorie cooking methods were replaced with healthier, low-calorie methods, and healthier options were provided at every food station. The team promoted healthier eating through messaging and media campaigns, and even found a way to bring the cafeteria to employees who were too busy to leave their units for a meal break—they created portable “mini-meals” consisting of sensible portions of fruits, vegetables, and low-calorie snacks.

**Sharing Recipes and Changing the Environment**  
*Saint Luke’s Health System*

The leadership at Saint Luke’s Health System, a mid- to large-sized employer and health care provider, capitalized on the strengths of each cafeteria in their system to promote healthier eating in all their cafeterias. They offered healthier food and financial incentives for employees who chose those foods. They also made environmental improvements and employed targeted communications and messaging strategies.

Hospitals within the system had operated independently with each site creating their own menus. Now with leadership from the CEO, hospitals have begun sharing nutritious recipes and strategies for increasing the sales of healthy options throughout the system. One approach was nutritional labeling using a Smart Selection Star on foods that meet healthy choice guidelines. The start-up was time consuming and labor intensive because every ingredient had to be entered and health values for each dish had to be calculated. Still, with all of the hospitals in the system working together, recipes only needed to be entered once. Nutrition information could be calculated once, and then shared across the system. Collaborating in this way has allowed hospital chefs and dietitians to develop a long-term strategy to increase healthy options and to promote featured healthy meals.

Saint Luke’s long-term strategy also includes environmental changes that influence food choices. For example, cafeterias have introduced “No Fry Fridays,” when deep-fried foods are not available for purchase, and some have gone so far as to remove their deep fat fryers altogether. Other strategies include introducing fresh dishes, changing the marketing and placement of healthier choices, and lowering prices on healthy dishes. Some sites promote featured meals, called D’Lish Dishes for employees who need a fast food option. They are marketed around monthly themes and offered as “grab-and-go” items that can be quickly reheated.
**Color-coding Healthy Food Selections**

**Cerner Corporation**

Cerner is a mid- to large-sized employer engaged in health care information management and technology. Their mission is “to solve healthcare challenges by making sure the right people have the right information at the right time.” That goes for the onsite cafeteria as well.

Employees are given the right information about healthy choices on the cafeteria salad bar at exactly the right time—the decision point—thanks to color-coded serving utensils. Red salad tongs are for garnishes that are high in calories. Yellow tongs are for foods and toppings that should be used sparingly, like beans or prepared salads. Green tongs are for foods that can be eaten freely, like lettuce and spinach and raw vegetables (without the dip, of course!). This “stoplight coding” approach is used by their vendor who partners closely with Cerner to provide “Right Choice” meals. The red-yellow-green labeling is also used in vending machines, which have been provisioned with more “green choices.”

Product placement is also used to promote healthier eating in Cerner’s cafeteria. For example, on the chip rack, the healthier baked chips are within easy reach at the top, while the fried chips are on the bottom shelf. But that isn’t all. Cerner encourages employees to make the “right choice” by providing price breaks on the daily entrees designated as the “healthy choice.”

**Committed to Providing Healthy Meals at Work**

**Hallmark Cards Inc.**

Food service may not be the core business of Hallmark Cards, known worldwide for its greeting cards and other products, but a commitment to providing good meals and a wide range of healthy choices to employees has been a core value since 1923. That was when founder J.C. Hall opened the Crown Room cafeteria in the company’s Kansas City headquarters. Hallmark’s cafeteria has been a model for other large companies over the years. They run their own food service with Hallmark employees and subsidize a portion of the cost of meals. Employees can pay for food with cash or a badge-swipe payroll deduction.

At the grab-and-go counter in the Café, Hallmark guides employees’ selections by labeling low-fat or low-calorie prepackaged foods. And like other employers, Hallmark provides substantial price breaks for many healthy foods offered on the lunch menu each day. When their workday ends, employees can pick up a take-home dinner—a convenience that allows them to serve Hallmark’s healthy meals to their families at home.

**RESOURCES**

- [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion’s new online resource with interactive tools developed to promote healthy eating. The new icon launched in June 2011 replaces MyPyramid.gov. [http://www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)
- [Choosing Foods and Beverages for Healthy Meetings, Conferences and Events and Guidance for Healthier Eating at Work](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/pdf/Healthy_Worksite_Food.pdf).
- [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/). Published jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Serving
as the basis for Federal food and nutrition education programs, these guidelines provide evidence-based nutrition information. [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)

- **Eat Smart North Carolina: A fun way to encourage employees to eat more fruits and vegetables every day.** Chronic Disease and Injury Section Division of Public Health N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch. [http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/FruitsAndVeggiesChallenge/Texts/FnVC_Overview(R1).pdf](http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/FruitsAndVeggiesChallenge/Texts/FnVC_Overview(R1).pdf)
- **Kansas City Collaborative (KC²) Case Studies.** KC² was a pilot program of the Mid-America Coalition on Health Care in Kansas City where 15 Kansas City employers established a number of best practices using evidence-based tools and resources. Case studies are available at [www.machc.org](http://www.machc.org) or [www.bhh-kc.org](http://www.bhh-kc.org)
- **The Community Guide – Obesity Prevention and Control: Worksite Programs.** Developed by CDC, this site describes worksite nutrition and physical activity worksite programs designed to improve health related behaviors and outcomes. These programs may include information, education, policy, systems and environmental changes to address health risk behaviors. [http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html)

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11 Ibid, p. 45.
PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING AT WORK

ESTABLISHING CSAS AND FARMERS MARKETS AT THE WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

Two key recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010 are to “increase vegetable and fruit intake” and to “eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green and red and orange vegetables and beans and peas.” But many employees eat foods prepared outside the home during the workday, including fast foods, which do not include adequate servings of fresh fruits and vegetables. So how can employers help their employees get better access to and consume more fresh fruits and vegetables? Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets are two approaches.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a program where participants buy shares of local, seasonal products usually from a cooperative alliance of farmers. Participants pledge in advance to pay a certain amount. In return, they receive “shares” or boxes of seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables (often with recipes for how to prepare them) throughout the growing season.

Farmers markets provide access to locally-grown, in-season produce from area farmers. Individual farmers set up booths to sell their homegrown produce, fruits, meat and cheese products, and other items (e.g., honey, cider, flowers, potted plants). Often, a business, neighborhood association, community group or faith community will provide a parking lot or other open space to host an outdoor or indoor farmers market. The advantages of participation are that the farmer sells directly to customers, which increases his or her profit margin by shortening the supply chain, and the customer gets produce at its peak flavor and peak nutritional value.

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

• Consumption of a diet high in fruits and vegetables (at least 5 servings a day) has been associated with reduced risk for chronic diseases including risk of cardiovascular disease (e.g., heart attack and stroke). Consumption of some fruits and vegetables may even protect against certain types of cancer.

• Farmers markets or CSA distribution at the workplace make it easy for employees and their families to eat healthier foods. Especially when can make purchases during their lunch break or as they’re headed for home.

• CSAs or farmers markets enable customers to support their community, their friends and neighbors, and nearby farmers. These programs also create a strong local food system that can provide healthy, sustainable and affordable foods in season.

• Foods that are grown locally travel a shorter distance from the farm to get to the consumer (or the store). This means produce can be picked when it’s ripe and full of rich nutrients instead of too early because it has to travel a long distance to market. And it’s better for the environment since less fuel and less packaging is used to truck produce long distances to market.
HOW TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING AT WORK

- Explore the possibilities for starting a CSA in your organization. Talk with your food service vendor or with other employers who have done it.
- Try it out. Join a CSA through a local grocery store or farmer and get fresh produce once a week. Tell others about your experience.
- Remember to make decisions based on convenience. Make it easy for employees to: 1) sign up for CSA memberships and 2) pick up their weekly food purchase. Consider using your worksite’s parking lot to provide quick, easy access for employees.
- Before recommending farmers markets to employees, visit some in your area to get a feel for how they work. While you shop, talk to the farmers about tips for growing, cooking and enjoying fresh vegetables.
- Provide a list of farmers markets in the surrounding community and encourage employees to visit one near their home.
- Start an onsite farmers market or promote one that’s near your workplace. If you’re ready to start an onsite market, you’ll find helpful information in the “Resources” section of this chapter.
- Recruit a team of dedicated volunteers to help manage and promote your CSA or farmers market. Ask your wellness team, food service or vendor-partner to volunteer.

CASE STUDIES

Serving the Community through a Worksite Farmers Market

Truman Medical Centers

Truman Medical Centers (TMC) is a mid- to large-sized employer that provides healthcare for the Kansas City community through its two-hospital, not-for-profit health system. TMC hosts the “Healthy Harvest Produce Market” on its Hospital Hill campus from April through October every year. To establish the market, TMC leveraged their cafeteria purchasing power and developed relationships with local farmers for procurement. They also solicited companies located nearby, such as Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, to co-sponsor the weekly market which is open to everyone in the surrounding community. Last year, TMC averaged about 360 customers per week.

TMC’s main campus (hospital) is in the urban core where many residents have limited access to grocery stores and fresh fruits and vegetables. The market allows TMC to provide healthier foods not only for their employees but also for the low-income population in their geographic service area. Registered dieticians and wellness coordinators from TMC are on hand to help provide healthy eating and living tips for market customers. And this year, the market is authorized to accept Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (S.N.A.P.) vouchers.

TMC has expanded offerings to include fresh bread, flowers, cheese, and other staples. Chefs regularly give living cooking demonstrations and tastings to show the community just how easy and enjoyable it can be to cook with fresh foods. Furthermore, TMC has begun offering onsite organic produce deliveries for their employees. This program was created in response to a survey of 200 employees on their interest in organic produce and helps TMC make sure their employees have access to their “five-a-day” year round!
A Downtown Farmers Market in the Park

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Region VII

Ilus W. Davis Park in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, is where many workers go for a brisk walk during the lunch hour. Now, they can pick up fresh produce there, too, thanks to a partnership between the City of Kansas City, Missouri’s Board of Parks and Recreation Commission and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) - Region VII, one of the largest employers in the Kansas City region. The groups founded Ilus W. Davis Park Farmers Market through a joint use agreement with the primary goal of offering a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the season.

The market is open 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. one day a week through the growing season. Farmers and producers are allowed to sell only what they grow or make (like locally produced meat, cheeses, honey, or baked goods). And they’re encouraged to support faith-based and community initiatives to feed the hungry. Kansas City Harvesters Community Food Network accepts any unsold goods vendors wish to donate at the end of the market day and donors are provided with a receipt for their tax deductible donations.

The market is designed to provide more than just sustenance. Producers are also expected to share information about how their food was grown, including where and under what conditions. This provides another way to raise Kansas City’s awareness about nutrition, where our food comes from, and the importance of making healthy choices.

A Drive-thru CSA

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics (CMH) understands the importance of its role as a prominent member of the community. So when leadership there learned about CSAs, they knew they had found a terrific way to give employees easy-access to locally produced fresh fruits, vegetables, meats, and cheeses, while supporting the greater Kansas City community.

In less than a year, their program has become one of the largest CSA sites in the region. Much of their success is due to teamwork between the vendor and the hospital. Their vendor organized the effort and made it as convenient as possible for employees to participate: the hospital collected weekly payments through payroll deduction, and employees were able to pick up their produce at a drive-through location in the parking lot staffed by the hospital Wellness Committee. Teamwork and a focus on quick and easy-access were key to making it convenient for almost 200 participating CMH employees to eat their fruits and vegetables.

Volunteers Make CSA a Success

Hallmark Cards Inc.

For the third year, Hallmark has partnered with a local vendor to host a CSA program. The project, supported by the Hallmark EcoTeam and food services staff, has been managed by four volunteers, fondly referred to as the “CSA Ambassadors.” They manage the membership, provide weekly CSA marketing emails, and handle details around the weekly distribution of shares. Each ambassador works a one-month shift during the four-month season of the CSA program, which runs June through September.
Food services staff work to make participation easy. They provide space for sign-up tables in the Crown Room, the Café and the Filling Station—common employee food service areas. Members can pay with cash, check, or by payroll deduction.

More than two hundred people sign up for the CSA at the beginning of each season. Hallmark’s success is the result of a convenient way to pay for and pick up shares, and the work of their strong team of dedicated volunteers.

**Partnering to Promote Fruits and Vegetables**

*American Century Investments*

This year, American Century Investments has partnered with a local vendor to offer CSA memberships to their employees. For $25 per week, from June to September, the CSA vendor delivers bags of locally-grown produce to participating employees. The program enables employees to support their local economy while putting fresh food on their table at an affordable price.

**RESOURCES**

- **Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing.** Check out this USDA web site for information on how to start a farmers market. While its focus is primarily how to establish farmers markets on government property, there are excellent tips and information that could inform worksites. [http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/farmersmarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/farmersmarkets)
- **Farmers Markets in the Kansas City area.** Employers can encourage their employees to visit local area farmers markets. [http://www.eatlocalkc.net](http://www.eatlocalkc.net)
- **Greater KC Food Policy Coalition** promotes the need for a strong local food system that provides healthy, sustainable and affordable foods for everyone living in Greater Kansas City. [http://kcfoodpolicy.ning.com/page/get-involved](http://kcfoodpolicy.ning.com/page/get-involved)
- **Kansas City CSA Coalition** works to increase food access and security in the Kansas City region by promoting Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives. [http://www.kc-csac.org/about/](http://www.kc-csac.org/about/)
  – To see the different types of CSAs that serve Kansas City, go to [http://www.kc-csac.org/about/types-of-csa-serving-kansas-city/](http://www.kc-csac.org/about/types-of-csa-serving-kansas-city/)
  – Or check out their Facebook page – the hub for CSA farmers and eaters to meet, organize, learn, expand KC’s food security, and promote just food practices. [http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kansas-City-CSA-Coalition/58226062294?sk=wall](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kansas-City-CSA-Coalition/58226062294?sk=wall)
- **Kansas City Food Circle Eat Local!** This all-volunteer organization provides a list of local farmers markets that feature organically-grown products. [http://www.kcfoodcircle.org/markets/](http://www.kcfoodcircle.org/markets/)
- **LocalHarvest** provides basic information about how CSAs work and how you can participate. [http://www.localharvest.org/csa/](http://www.localharvest.org/csa/)
  – While most of their farmers sell directly to their local communities, check out the “shop” tab for a listing of products that may be purchased via mail order at [http://www.localharvest.org/the-kansas-city-csa-coalition-M41751](http://www.localharvest.org/the-kansas-city-csa-coalition-M41751)
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5 Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition. http://kcfoodpolicy.ning.com/page/get-involved
INTRODUCTION

Walk into any business and you can usually find a vending machine pretty quickly. Unfortunately, you might not find many healthy choices in it. Processed food options are typically high in fat, salt, and sugar, while fresh food is scarce. The beverages are also high in sugar and fat (e.g., soft drinks, sugary-flavored drinks, and whole milk). When companies improve food selections in worksite vending machines, they can create an environment where employees find the “easy choice is the healthy choice.”

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

• Increasing the availability of healthier food purchases through vending machines is one way to help employees eat healthier foods at work.²
• Identifying the healthy vending machine items (e.g., calorie content) increases the likelihood that employees will make the healthier choice.³
• Placement of healthier foods in vending machines (upper right) or identification of the healthier selections with stickers can make them more visible and increase the chances that employees will choose the healthier option.³, ⁴
• Discounts on healthier items increase purchasing and consumption of healthier foods from vending machines.⁵
• Promoting sales of healthier items through marketing materials and e-mail messages may increase the sales of healthier items and make it more likely that the vendor will continue or even increase the number of healthier foods in the vending machines.

HOW TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING AT WORK

• Just ask! Ask your vendors what they can do to help you serve up healthier items in your organization’s vending machines. Let them know your goal is to help employees make healthier food choices.
• Work with your vendor to compile a list of “healthy choice” items you would like to sell. Include low-fat granola bars, reduced-fat cookies or crackers, whole grain cereal bars or fig bars.
• Recognize that even though your vendor may support “Right Choice” strategies, the person who stocks the vending machine may need to be reminded about proper placement and labeling of healthier items.
• Stock machines beverages that are low in added sugars: 100% fruit juices, regular and/or decaffeinated coffee, or tea. Make water readily available for employees.
• Stock up on dried fruits like raisins or cranberries to provide healthier vending options and increase consumption of fruit.
• Offer foods that are lower in salt and sodium, such as unsalted pretzels, popcorn, or baked chips.
• Consider purchasing a refrigerated vending machine so you can sell fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat yogurt, string cheese and sugar-free gelatin or pudding. Some newer vending machines offer better presentation and delivery of healthier items. Ask your vendor what’s available.
• As much as possible, include small portion sizes: mini-muffins, mini-bagels, and 1-inch low-fat cheese squares.
• Place the vending machines with the healthiest choices in areas where the most employees can access them.
• Keep at it! Expect to meet resistance, but remember that persistence pays off. Employers who have successfully made changes did so incrementally.

CASE STUDIES

Collaborative Approach Promotes Healthier Options
City of Kansas City, Missouri

The City of Kansas City, Missouri is a mid- to large-sized government employer with multiple departments and a diverse workforce. Because Kansas City’s Health Department promotes healthier workplace vending, the government office wanted to lead by example. They partnered with the City Purchasing Department and the city’s vendor to improve the nutritional quality of their vending machine selections. Since there was no mandate or written policy requiring the sale of “healthy items,” the group needed a creative approach that would meet the goals of all parties. As a result, the city and the vendor brainstormed strategies and developed a supportive partnership to incrementally improve healthy food offerings throughout the city.

The central challenge was agreeing on definitions and standards of healthy selections based on sound nutritional principles—the vendor’s initial criteria differed in some aspects from the standards recommended by public health advocates or adopted by employers leading the way. To reconcile this, a Health Department dietitian reviewed the nutritional quality of all the snacks and beverages offered in their vending machines, as well as a list provided by the vendor of healthier selections that could be stocked. The goal in the end was to gain agreement on nutritional guidelines and design a standardized system to identify healthier vending selections.

The collaboration hasn’t been limited to the city and their vendors. The Health Department is also conducting a pilot program to promote, test and evaluate a selection of offerings that meet the new healthier guidelines. A city-wide Employee Work Group, led by the Health Department, was formed to gather input from stakeholders—including employees who don’t support the healthier initiatives. This will help the city move forward with a balanced approach to health promotion through their vending machine offerings. The pilot program is in the early planning stages and the program will be implemented incrementally over the next 18-24 months.
**Walking the Talk**

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Region VII**

Federal agencies like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) - Region VII are committed to supporting the health of citizens. It’s their mission to keep the public informed on scientifically proven ways to prevent and treat chronic disease. So, when it became apparent that improving eating habits could prevent many chronic diseases, local leadership at HHS – Region VII decided it was time to do something to promote healthy eating in their own work environment.

With the U.S. government being the largest employer in the country, as well as in Kansas City, leaders at HHS believed they should serve as an “innovative role model” for employee health and wellness strategies. When these ideas were presented to Jason Klumb, the interim Regional Administrator for the U.S. General Services Administration’s Heartland Region, he agreed. As a result, two recommendations were implemented in the Bolling Federal Building. First, three vending machines were dedicated solely to healthier foods, and second, calorie information (or menu labeling) was provided on some of the entrees in the federal worksite cafeterias.

Working with their vendor, HHS reduced the percentage of vended snacks and beverages that were of poor nutritional quality. They introduced healthier products like baked chips, pretzels, and 100-calorie snack packs of thin crisp cookies and crackers, and offered discounted pricing for the healthier choices. HHS increased access to the three dedicated “healthy” vending machines by placing them where employee traffic was highest and access was easiest.

By making healthier food options more available in their building’s vending machines, HHS reinforced its message about the importance of promoting healthier lifestyles in the workplace. More importantly, they helped improve the health of a significant workforce population in the Kansas City metropolitan region.

**Consolidated and Healthier Choices 24/7**

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City (Blue KC), a mid-sized employer and Kansas City’s leading provider of health insurance and wellness services, selected Treat America Food Services, a Kansas City-based company, as their new food and beverage vendor because of Treat America’s focus on innovative ways to deliver variety, quality, and fresh options to employees. In addition to the traditional food service in the employees’ Blue Moon Café (Right Course–daily heart healthy recipes; Café Grill–healthy options as well as traditional fare; Deli–made to order sub-style sandwiches; and Salad Bar–a fresh variety of daily mixed greens and accompaniments employing the colored-tong system), Treat America also provides employees with Company Kitchen. This mini market replaces all the vending machines throughout the operations building and is open 24/7, offering a wide variety of color-labeled, freshly prepared foods (crisp salads and fresh sandwiches), healthy snacks (fruit and yogurt) and beverages (dairy products, protein drinks, juices, and water).

Employees order and pay for their items at kiosks in an entirely cashless environment with pre-paid Company Kitchen cards or personal debit/credit cards. Using their Company Kitchen card provides employees with special rewards and incentives as well as online tracking functions. To inform employees about the change: articles were posted on Blue KC’s intranet; an informational e-mail was sent from the operations senior executive prior to the launch as well as a vendor welcome e-mail the morning of the grand opening; posters were displayed in break rooms in
advance and after the vending machine removal; table tents were placed in the cafeteria area and break rooms; transition menus were carefully planned and communicated; and an Employee Restaurant Board was instituted for ongoing feedback. Employees are enjoying the new, fresh, and easily accessible choices and the Blue Moon Café has become a popular destination for the lunchtime crowd.

RESOURCES


• **Healthy Vending Guide.** Developed by Nemours, one of the nation’s leading pediatric health systems, this resource provides guidelines for healthy vending foods and beverages, sample policies and marketing strategies to promote healthier options. [http://nemours.org/filebox/service/preventive/nhps/resource/healthyvending.pdf](http://nemours.org/filebox/service/preventive/nhps/resource/healthyvending.pdf)

• **Meeting Well: A Tool for Planning Healthy Meetings and Events.** Developed as part of a toolkit by the American Cancer Society, this section addresses healthy vending machine choices. [http://www.acsworkplacesolutions.com/wpsPDFs/MeetingWell_GuideBook_F251300.pdf](http://www.acsworkplacesolutions.com/wpsPDFs/MeetingWell_GuideBook_F251300.pdf)

• **Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity.** These PowerPoint slides created by CDC can be downloaded and tailored for use. [http://www.cdc.gov/WinnableBattles/Obesity/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/WinnableBattles/Obesity/index.html)

• **The Community Guide – Obesity Prevention and Control: Worksite Programs.** Developed by the CDC, this site describes worksite nutrition and physical activity worksite programs designed to improve health related behaviors and outcomes. These programs may include information, education, policy, systems and environmental changes to address health risk behaviors. [http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/workprograms.html)

REFERENCES


HEALTHY FOODS FOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS

INTRODUCTION
Many organizations provide food at meetings and events – from small lunch meetings to large conferences. When the food you offer is healthy, your employees and guests get the message that your organization is committed to their good health. They also see that healthy foods are easy to serve and enjoyable to eat!

IMPORTANT CONCEPT
Workplace policies affect a company’s culture and support individual behavior change. Not only can a policy change make it easier for employees to make healthier choices at work, it can also influence employees’ behaviors outside of the workplace.¹

HOW TO IMPROVE FOOD OFFERED AT MEETINGS AND EVENTS

• Serve low-calorie and low-fat foods at meetings and events. Seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables are always a good choice. You can also offer smaller portion sizes; serve mini-muffins or mini-bagels, or ask that full portions be cut in half.
• A mid-morning or mid-afternoon meeting doesn’t have to provide an “in-between meals” snack. Instead of serving food, consider offering only beverages (e.g., coffee, tea, water or fruit juices).
• If you must offer a mid-morning or mid-afternoon snack, offer dried fruit mix, raisins, cranberries, pretzels, peanuts, almonds or cashews (clearly labeled for those with food allergies). Low-fat granola bars, fig bars, or whole-grain cereal bars or cookies (like oatmeal cookies) are also good choices. Offer 100% fruit and vegetable juice. Low-fat frozen yogurt or fruit smoothies can also liven up an afternoon meeting.
• Place a bowl of fruit in the center of the table for snacking. It makes a great centerpiece and can replace the candy dishes that are frequently seen at meetings and events.
• When planning meals for events or multiple-day meetings, ask your caterer or chef to provide fruits and vegetables with every meal, and to include fruit as a dessert option or garnish. Ask for smaller portion sizes of everything, and for sauces and salad dressings to be served on the side. Some chefs are open to using low-fat cooking methods to reduce calories. All you have to do is ask!
• Request caterers, chefs and others who make food purchases for your organization and events your organization sponsors to “buy local” and buy nutrient-dense foods when they can.
• Keep at it! You might meet resistance, but your persistence will pay off. Employers who have successfully made changes did so incrementally.
CASE STUDIES

Standing for Healthier Options
Mid-America Coalition on Health Care

Mid-America Coalition on Health Care (MACHC) is a not-for-profit business coalition whose mission is to: improve the health of employees and their families; promote employee and community wellness and illness prevention; develop strategies and initiatives for containing business health care costs; and generate and communicate health care information to the community. Carrying out this mission requires collaboration, and that involves a lot of meetings, most of which include some form of refreshment.

To reinforce the messages they were promoting, MACHC wanted to provide healthier food at these events. But they found it wasn’t easy. When they asked the chef at one location to serve healthier breakfast options like oatmeal, low-fat yogurt, and fresh fruit and mini-muffins instead of bacon and eggs and biscuits and gravy, MACHC met resistance. The chef was uninterested in changing his standard breakfast fare menu, and convinced that no one would eat the healthier options.

MACHC eventually persuaded the chef to give it a try by explaining the purpose of the meeting and the power of modeling healthy choices. After several conversations, the chef agreed to change the menu with the caveat that if the food wasn’t eaten, he would revert to his standard breakfast fare menu for future events. Much to MACHC’s delight—and the chef’s surprise—the healthier items were a hit!

When MACHC hosted a dinner for the director of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), they asked the caterer to follow the federal government’s Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. After gently smoothing some ruffled feathers, MACHC engaged the chef in a discussion about what “healthy” means and how some of his signature entrees might not qualify. In the end, the menu changes were simple and the food was well-received. What’s more, a premier caterer in the community had a new understanding of healthy eating.

MACHC also has reduced the amount of food they order for meetings and events. Traditionally, their meetings begin at 7:30 a.m. with a light continental breakfast. After seeing how much of the relatively expensive breakfast items went to waste, MACHC simplified the menu and offered only fruit and yogurt, water and coffee.

Changing Policy and Practice to Promote Change
City of Kansas City, Missouri, Health Department

To increase healthy options served at meetings and events, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, Health Department has made informal changes at the organizational level. First, they drafted an internal policy aimed at improving the quality of meals and snacks served at their own meetings, and at community meetings hosted by the health department. Next, they met with community and faith-based partners to learn about their experience with providing healthy options for meetings and events. They encouraged these partners to incorporate more fresh fruits and vegetables at their luncheons and other gatherings and to serve as models for the people of Kansas City.
RESOURCES

• **Choosing Foods and Beverages for Healthy Meetings, Conferences and Events and Guidance for Healthier Eating at Work.** Developed by CDC.
  

• **Fruits and Veggies Matter: Fruit & Vegetable Benefits.** Developed by CDC.  
  

• **Guidelines for Offering Healthy Foods at Meetings, Seminars and Catered Events.**  
  University of Minnesota, School of Public Health.  
  

• **Meeting Well: A Tool for Planning Healthy Meetings and Events.** Developed by the American Cancer Society, this tool can help employers plan meetings and events with healthier food and beverage choices in mind. It includes a section on healthy vending machine choices.  
  

• **The Community Guide – Obesity Prevention and Control: Worksite Programs.**  
  Developed by the CDC, this site describes worksite nutrition and physical activity worksite programs designed to improve health related behaviors and outcomes. These programs may include information, education, policy, systems and environmental changes to address health risk behaviors.  
  

• **WellSteps. Worksite Wellness Implementation Guide.**  
  

REFERENCES

Promoting Healthy Eating at Work

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