



Guidance by Food Category

It's often helpful to have guidance for each food type or category. The information below includes both general recommendations and nutrition standards. More specific information is provided in other sections of the Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit.

Bars (grain-based)

- Most bars are high in added sugars, so generally they aren't a healthy choice.
- If offered, bars should be a good source of dietary fiber (10-19% Daily Value) with no more than 7 g total sugars per label serving.
- See [Nutrition Standards](#) in Snacks section.

Beverages

Acceptable beverages are:

- 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

Breads and Grain-Based Products

- Grain-based products include bagels, biscuits, breads, rolls, cereals (cold and hot), crackers, pancakes, French toast, waffles and muffins.
- Serve only whole-grain products.
- Must be a good source of dietary fiber (10-19% Daily Value) without excess calories from added sugars.
- No more than 7 g total sugars per serving if good source of dietary fiber (10-19% DV) or no more than 9 g total sugars per serving if excellent source of dietary fiber (> 20% DV).

- No butter-crust, egg or cheese breads.
- No bakery items, biscuits, corn bread, croissants, Danishes, muffins or pastries.

Cheese

- Limit cheese, as it's usually high in sodium and saturated fat. Compare nutrition information and choose wisely. Varieties such as mozzarella and Swiss may have less fat and sodium.
- Cheese should be served in small quantities and thinly sliced (for sandwiches), grated or crumbled (as a garnish), or served in small cubes (for a reception). Don't serve whole blocks or wheels of cheese.
- Avocado or hummus can take the place of cheese for a vegan sandwich.

Chips

- Snack chips should not be served at meals and events. Small amounts of whole-grain chips served with salsa or hummus (along with veggies) are OK.
- Baked chips or pretzels are OK in vending machines.
- See [Nutrition Standards](#) in Snacks section.

Condiments

- Traditional condiments (ketchup, mustard, mayo) can be high in sodium, added sugars, calories and fats, so compare nutrition information and choose wisely.
- Serve on the side or in individual packets.
- Healthier alternatives may include: fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto, salsa. (Compare nutrition information if available.)

Dairy

- Milk, cheese, cottage cheese and sour cream should be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%).
- Yogurt should have no more than 20 g total sugars per 6 oz. serving.

Dessert

- Serve dessert only for special occasion dinners, such as gala events. Desserts aren't needed at most lunches, dinners and receptions.
- Fresh fruit and fruit-based desserts are better choices than traditional desserts (no cheesecake, crème brûlée, cake, ice cream, tiramisu, candy, etc.). See [Healthier Dessert Ideas](#) in Receptions, Galas and Special Events section.
- A good benchmark is no more than 200 calories per serving.

Fruit

- Include fruit and/or vegetables with every meal.
- Fresh, frozen, dried and canned fruit can all be healthy choices.
- Canned fruit should be packed in water, its own juice or light syrup (no heavy syrup).
- Frozen fruit should be 100% fruit with no added sugars.

Juice

- Should be 100% fruit or vegetable juice with no added sugars.
- No more than 120 calories per 8 fl. oz.
- Try to serve juice in small (4–6 oz.) portions.
- For vegetable juice, compare nutrition information and choose the option with the lowest amount of sodium (but no more than 360 mg per label serving).

Meat, Poultry and Seafood

- Portions ideally should be 3 oz. and no more than 6 oz. (cooked weight).
- Healthier cooking methods include: baked, broiled, braised, grilled, poached (fish), roasted, stir-fried or sautéed in broth or with a small amount of healthier oil.

Beef and Pork

- Beef and pork labeled “loin” and “round” usually have the least fat.
- “Choice” or “select” grades of beef are healthier choices than “prime.”
- Fat should be trimmed before cooking.
- Ground beef should be at least 95% extra lean.

Poultry

- Use skinless chicken and turkey or remove the skin before cooking. (Most of the fat is in the skin.)
- Use lean ground turkey and chicken, but check the nutrition information, if available. It can have excess fat.

Fish and Seafood

- Oily types of fish are better choices because they tend to be rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
- Fish higher in omega-3 fatty acids include: bass (striped bass, freshwater bass, sea bass), herring, mackerel, pompano, salmon, swordfish, trout, tuna.
- Other acceptable fish and seafood include: catfish, cod, crawfish, flounder, grouper, halibut, orange roughy, perch, pollock, scallops, shrimp, sole, snapper, tilapia.
- Some types of fish can contain high levels of mercury and other environmental contaminants. Children and pregnant or nursing women should avoid eating potentially contaminated fish such as shark, tilefish, king mackerel and swordfish.

Nuts

- Better choices are almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts.
- No more than 140 mg sodium per label serving.
- Serve nuts on the side because some people have nut allergies.

Oils

- Request foods be cooked with liquid vegetable oil instead of butter, lard or shortening.
- Healthier oils include canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, sesame, soybean and sunflower. Canola, corn, olive and safflower contain the least saturated fat.
- No partially hydrogenated oils or *trans* fat.

Pastas

- Use whole-grain pasta – it's a better source of dietary fiber.
- Serve with tomato-based sauce, not cream sauce.

Salads

- Offer a salad option with meals.
- Salads may include a variety of vegetables, fruits and legumes (beans) to add flavor and nutritional value.
- Offer nuts or seeds on the side as a healthy topping option instead of croutons or bacon bits.
- Avoid ingredients with a lot of sodium, such as olives, capers and anchovies.

Salad Dressings

- Serve dressings on the side.
- Always include oil & vinegar made with a healthier oil as an option.
- May also serve vinaigrettes and low-fat or reduced fat dressings such as Italian and French.
- Request nutrition information, if available, and choose the option with the lowest amount of sodium, sugars, saturated fat and *trans* fat.

Sauces (including Gravy)

- Sauces can be tricky, but you don't need to avoid them completely. Sauces add flavor and may help keep meats and vegetables from getting too dry.
- Ask what a particular sauce contains because the name alone probably won't tell you all you need to know about the ingredients.

- Avoid heavy sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients.
- Pasta/Italian dishes should be prepared with tomato sauces, not cream sauces.
- Serve sauces on the side when possible.

Soups

- Soups can be high in sodium. For premade soups, check nutrition information if available and choose varieties with the lowest amount of sodium. Soups made from scratch – with lots of vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes – are typically better choices because you can control the amount of sodium.

Vegetables

- Include vegetables and/or fruit with every meal.
- Should be prepared and served without butter.
- Acceptable sauces should be served on the side.
- May be enhanced with herbs, spices, salt-free seasonings, a small amount of healthier oil, a flavored vinegar or a squeeze of lemon or lime.
- Healthier cooking methods: grilled, marinated, roasted, steamed, stir-fried or sautéed in broth or with a small amount of healthier oil.
- Fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables can all be healthy choices. If using canned or frozen versions, compare nutrition information and choose items with the lowest amounts of sodium and added sugars.
- Canned vegetables (except tomato-based) should have no more than 240 mg sodium per label serving. Canned tomatoes and tomato-based products should have no more than 360 mg sodium per label serving.
- Frozen plain vegetables should have no more than 140 mg sodium per label serving.

Yogurt

- No more than 20 g total sugars per standard 6 oz. serving.
- Offer fruit and/or nuts as toppings. (*See Nuts above.*)