



## HEALTHY WORKPLACE FOOD AND BEVERAGE TOOLKIT

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### Questions and Answers

#### **ABOUT THE TOOLKIT**

**Q: Who is the primary audience for the Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit?**

A: The toolkit is a resource for everyone involved with ordering and purchasing foods and beverages in the workplace setting. It addresses four key elements: Meetings, Catered Meals, Snacks and Vending.

The Food and Beverage Toolkit is designed as a turn-key resource and is ready for immediate use. It provides practical and actionable guidance that is easy to understand and apply. Anyone who plans menus or makes decisions about foods and beverages served can feel empowered to start using the guidance right away.

The toolkit was developed for AHA staff, our partnering organizations and external workplaces. It is designed to improve the healthfulness of food and drink choices, creating a healthier environment for everyone. Making healthy changes in the workplace, where many adults spend much of their day, is an important way to help people be healthier.

**Q: Can the toolkit be used by faith-based and community organizations?**

A: Yes. This toolkit is appropriate for a wide variety of audiences. While the toolkit was originally designed for workplaces and corporations, we recognize its applicability to many different organizational settings. The toolkit is currently being customized for other organizations and communities, including faith-based organizations, who are committed to improving their food environment. All the technical content will remain the same, but the language and imagery, including references to the workplace, will be revised.

**Q: Why do we have to register for the toolkit?**

A: All users must register to access the free toolkit online. This will help us in the following ways:

- tracking users, both internal and external,
- following up with external companies who are using the toolkit, and
- communicating with users to notify them about future enhancements.

This toolkit is an evolving, evergreen resource that will continue to be updated.

**Q: What if I have questions or ideas to share?**

A: So glad you asked! We welcome your feedback, questions and success stories. Just send an email to: [workplacefood@heart.org](mailto:workplacefood@heart.org)

**Q: Will the toolkit be available in print?**

A: To keep the content as up-to-date and accessible as possible, the toolkit is only available online at this time. It is printer-friendly if you find that you need printed copies of any of the resources.

The toolkit will be posted online in two ways: (1) as one large document inclusive of most content; and (2) as a compendium of separate documents so that users can easily identify and quickly access the pieces most relevant to them.

**Q: How does the Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit compare to other resources of this nature?**

A: There are a number of toolkits and resources available from various sources, and the focus and format vary widely. It's difficult to make direct comparisons between resources in light of the differing objectives of the organizations involved.

Here are some key points of differentiation that we believe set the AHA Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit apart from other toolkits:

- Core principles that drove our development process, including (but not limited to):
  - AHA Food and Beverage Guidance should align with the 2020 Health Impact Goal & Metrics, Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations, and Advocacy Positions to the fullest extent possible;
  - Food and beverage guidance should drive environmental changes; should be aspirational but achievable over time;
  - Must be operationally feasible.
- Addresses four key areas: Meetings, Catered Meals, Snacks and Vending.
- Provides practical and actionable suggestions that are easy to understand and apply.
- Registration is required, which facilitates user tracking, follow up and communication.
- Our toolkit is an evergreen resource that will continue to be updated.
- Feedback mechanism provided via a dedicated email address: [workplacefood@heart.org](mailto:workplacefood@heart.org).
- In addition to informational content, the toolkit provides numerous user tools to facilitate implementation. At launch, these tools include the following:
  - Q and A
  - Pledge form
  - Sample email to employees
  - Action Plan for On-site meals
  - Menu Plan for Off-site Events
  - Action Plan for Vending Machines
  - Vending Machine Inventory Worksheet for Food
  - Vending Machine Inventory Worksheet for Beverages
  - Guidance for Caterers and Food Vendors
  - Quick Start Guide
  - Pre-Implementation Assessment
- The toolkit is being customized for other types of organizations and communities, including faith-based organizations, who would like to improve their food environment.

## **USING THE TOOLKIT TO PLAN HEALTHIER MEETINGS AND MEALS**

### **Q: Will this be hard if I don't have nutrition expertise?**

A: Not at all. The toolkit offers simple, specific guidance that can be implemented by anyone. It also includes a glossary of common food and nutrition terms, real-life examples from actual foodservice menus, and a Quick Start Guide that provides all of the most important guidance in one place.

### **Q: Will planning healthier meals take more time?**

A: No, actually, we anticipate that it will take less time to plan and serve healthier meals once you become familiar with the toolkit content.

### **Q: Will planning healthier meals mean I have fewer options?**

A: If you've already jumped on the healthier eating bandwagon, you likely won't feel like you have fewer options. In fact, you may find that in certain situations you have more options than you thought you had. We recognize that the food environment can be challenging, but the great news is that hotel and restaurant chefs are typically willing to work with us to create tasty, healthy meals. Sometimes they even offer you things that aren't on the menu.

### **Q: Will offering healthier food cost more?**

A: Planning and serving healthier foods and beverages is not expected to increase costs. Depending upon what you have been serving up until now, you may find that your food and beverage costs actually decrease. The bottom line is, even if it saves a few cents here and there, serving unhealthy meals is simply not an option. Let your food vendor know what your budget is at the beginning of the meal-planning process so that they can plan accordingly.

### **Q: What are some easy ways to determine if a menu item is healthy?**

A: The easiest thing to do is ask what a dish contains if you aren't sure. The toolkit offers a lot of guidance on specific foods and ingredients. To make things even easier, we recommend giving your food vendor the **"Guidance for Caterers and Food Vendors"** resource up front. This piece spells out very clearly the types of foods and ingredients that are appropriate to include when planning meals. Then ask what menu items they can suggest based on this guidance.

### **Q: Will planning healthier meals mean boring, bland food? My supervisor depends on me to plan meals that make people happy.**

A: Healthier foods don't have to be boring or flavorless. Many chefs and food vendors enjoy creating healthier options that people will love. The toolkit offers many suggestions for making meals flavorful and appealing. We want eating to be enjoyable! For some people, it may take their taste buds a little time to adjust, especially if they have a tendency to eat foods containing high amounts of added sugars, sodium and/or calories. However, many people are making efforts to eat healthier at home, and you'll likely find that a similar focus at work will be appreciated.

## **TOOLKIT CONTENT**

### **Q: Why is there such a strong emphasis on fruits and vegetables in the toolkit?**

A: Fruits and vegetables are an important part of an overall healthy diet. They're typically high in vitamins, minerals and fiber and low in saturated fat and calories. Most also have no or little sodium. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables can help control weight, blood pressure and cholesterol and lower risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. The AHA encourages enjoying a variety of fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Most adults should aim for 4-5 servings of fruits and 4-5 servings of vegetables a day (a serving is about ½ to 2/3 cup).

### **Q: Why does the guidance allow for added sugars in some food and beverage products but not others? For example, why are we allowing for up to 50% of the beverage options in a vending machine to be sugar-sweetened beverages, but requiring the elimination of all candy?**

A: The toolkit calls for *reducing and ultimately eliminating* sugar-sweetened beverages. The intent is to allow for time to transition to having no regular soft drinks or sugar-sweetened beverages.

## **HEALTHIER OFFICE FOOD**

### **Q: What is “office food?”**

A: “Office food” refers to food in the workplace that is often:

- Provided at no cost to employees.
- Available in a common area on a “help yourself” basis.
- Purchased or made by employees.

Examples include leftovers from catered events, snacks brought in by employees and special occasion foods. Office food can be a challenge when you're trying to create a culture of health. It can encourage between meal snacking and sabotage people who are trying to eat healthier or lose weight. The toolkit provides recommendations to help manage the challenges of office food.

### **Q: What can we do for celebrations?**

A: This is one of many topics addressed in the toolkit. Celebrations are important, and special occasions can be just as special when the focus is on something other than unhealthy foods. Traditional party foods that contain high amounts of added sugars, sodium, calories and unhealthy fats can sabotage people who are trying to eat healthier or lose weight. Check out the Office Food and Healthier Snack Ideas sections in the toolkit. And get creative with your own ideas for healthier celebrations! (Don't forget to share them with us at [workplacefood@heart.org](mailto:workplacefood@heart.org).)