



American
Heart
Association.

HEALTHY COMMUNITY food and beverage

TOOLKIT





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Introduction



American Heart Association

Mission

To build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke.

Health Impact Goal

By 2020, to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent.



EmPowered To Serve

EmPowered To Serve is a community of diverse individuals and organizations united to create a sustainable culture of health across the nation. Participants take steps individually to improve their health and work together to make healthy living an accessible, affordable reality for everyone.

Join the EmPowered To Serve movement at www.empoweredtoserve.org.

Together we can make a positive, lasting impact by creating a legacy to thrive, not just survive. We are EmPowered To Serve. Serve our health, serve our community.



EmPOWERED To Serve™



Background

More than two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese¹, putting them at risk for heart disease and stroke as well as many other chronic illnesses and conditions. The outlook for African Americans and Hispanics is significantly more dire than for Caucasians. Multicultural audiences are disproportionately at risk for cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Making healthy changes in places where people come together in community is an important way to help people be healthier. It also helps cultivate social norms that foster healthier choices and behaviors.

The research is clear that eating nutritious foods and eating only enough to meet energy needs can reduce cardiovascular disease risk and promote wellness. In fact, consuming the right amounts of the right foods may be the single most important thing we can do for cardiovascular health!

The American Heart Association believes that everyone deserves to live a healthier, longer life. Through our science-based knowledge, we empower people, communities and organizations to build a sustainable culture of health. To support our health impact goal of helping all Americans improve their cardiovascular health, the American Heart Association encourages organizations and communities to create a healthy food and beverage environment.

Together, we can create an environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

This toolkit is designed for anyone involved with serving, preparing or purchasing food and beverages, from an on-site vending machine to an off-site special event involving catering. Our goal is to provide practical, actionable suggestions that are easy to understand and apply. You can modify the guidance we offer to fit the specific needs of your organization.

Through our many healthy living programs, the American Heart Association offers a variety of recommendations and guidance on food choices and healthy eating. Collectively, they are intended to assist people in all settings and aspects of their lives. The common goal of all AHA nutrition-related programs and initiatives is to empower individuals to adopt a heart-healthy eating pattern that works for them. Foods with varying amounts of calories, sodium, sugars and fats can be part of a balanced and heart-healthy dietary pattern. The food and beverage guidance in this toolkit is intended for healthy adults. People with special medical needs or dietary restrictions should seek the advice of their health professionals.

¹ National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2007 to 2010 (adults), unpublished National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) tabulation

Terminology

Throughout this toolkit and future additions we will use these terms with these definitions:

Culture of Health: A culture in which people live, work, learn, play and pray in environments that support healthy behaviors, timely quality care and overall well-being. The healthy choice is the easy choice. All people feel inspired and empowered about their health and making healthy choices.

Food Environment: Food and beverages included in the surroundings (e.g., in vending machines, cafeterias, offered at meetings/special occasions, kitchens) that affect an individual's ability to choose healthy options.

Guidance: Recommendations, ideas and quantitative standards to guide your efforts to create a healthier environment.

Guidelines: Science-based, peer-reviewed statements that help doctors and patients decide appropriate treatment.

Policy: A course of action or rule intended to establish a procedure or protocol; policy can be established

and adopted by governments (through regulation or legislation) or by decision makers to facilitate change within environments like agencies, organizations, corporations, schools or communities.

Procurement: The acquisition of goods or services; the purchase or acquisition of foods and beverages for consumption within the environment.

Standards: A set of nutrition criteria that may include nutrients to avoid as well as foods and beverages to encourage; the standards establish the foods and beverages eligible to be served or purchased within a healthy food environment.

Sustainable: Affordable, accessible and produced with care for the environment, animals and people. Contributes to the capacity of the system to endure and remain viable over time.

Vending Machine: A device that dispenses foods and beverages for a cost.

Vendor: A restaurant, caterer, hotel or other provider of food and beverages.



Healthy Community Recommendations

- Support healthier choices, provide leadership and role modeling, and create a culture of health.
- Offer nutritious food and beverage options.
- Offer physical activity opportunities that are relevant to the audience and environment to help people achieve at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Provide a tobacco-free environment.
- Prioritize sustainable practices when possible by minimizing waste, encouraging recycling and sourcing products from sustainable producers.

Healthy Eating Recommendations

- Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables. A typical adult should try for 4 servings of fruits and 5 servings of vegetables every day. A serving is one medium fruit; 1 cup raw leafy vegetable; ½ cup raw, cooked, canned or frozen vegetables or fruits; ½ cup juice; or ¼ cup dried fruit.
- Choose fiber-rich whole grains (three 1-oz. servings per day).
- Eat fish, especially oily fish high in omega-3 fatty acids (like salmon), twice a week.
- Eat less of the bad fats (saturated and *trans* fats) and replace them with better fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats). Avoid partially hydrogenated oils and foods made from them. Select fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) dairy products.
- Eat at least four servings a week of nuts, seeds and legumes (beans). (A serving is 1/3 cup nuts, 2 Tbsp. seeds or 1/2 cup dry beans or peas.)
- Try to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day.
- Limit the amount of added sugars you consume. Keep added sugars to no more than 100 calories per day for most American women and 150 calories per day for most American men. (That's about 6 teaspoons/day for women and 9 teaspoons/day for men.)
- Choose lean meats. Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami), dark meat cuts, and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.



The American Heart Association's healthy eating recommendations are based on a 2,000-calorie per day diet.



Simple Steps to Get Started

Improving your food environment may seem like a daunting task. Start with attainable goals, evaluate your efforts, and make adjustments over time to keep improving. Here are seven easy ways to start:

1	Reduce and ultimately eliminate regular soft drinks and sugar-sweetened beverages.	5	Switch to whole-grain bread and bread products.
2	Offer at least one fruit and/or vegetable serving with every meal.	6	Serve fruit instead of traditional desserts.
3	Do not serve butter.	7	Do not serve fried foods.
4	Reduce and ultimately eliminate candy in vending machines.		

Creating a Culture of Healthy Eating

- Lead by example. Eat better. When organization leaders support and model healthy eating, it makes a powerful statement.
- Sign a pledge or commitment and post it prominently in a common area where employees and visitors can see it. *(See [Healthy Community Food and Beverage Pledge](#).)*
- Communicate to your employees, members and visitors that you care about their health and well-being. Provide education and resources about healthy living and eating. Help people understand why your community is making an effort to provide healthier food and beverages. *(See [Sample Email to Community Members](#).)*
- Identify and use vendors who provide healthier foods and beverages.
- Recognize individuals who step up as leaders in promoting healthier choices.
- Share your commitment with other leaders in your community. Challenge them to lead by example, too.
- Select healthy foods when you dine with colleagues and employees.



How to Implement This Guidance in Your Community

- Get leadership approval and engagement.
- Work with staff from human resources, facilities, operations, purchasing and other relevant departments. Review sections of the toolkit most relevant to each group.
- Consult with external partners as needed. This may include food and beverage vendors, a registered dietitian or nutritionist, unions, your insurance company, workplace wellness specialists, your local American Heart Association and other nutrition advocates.
- Assess your current food environment and any existing policies and vendor contracts.
- Create an action plan and timeline. Determine which changes can be made immediately and which will be made in the future.
- Draft policies (if needed).
- Work with vendors and staff to implement changes.
- Communicate specific changes and new policies to the community.
- Monitor, evaluate and communicate results.

Potluck Food

“Potluck food” refers to food in the environment that is often:

- Provided at no cost to anyone who wishes to partake.
- Available in a common area on a “help yourself” basis.
- Purchased or made by employees or community members for others to consume.

Examples include potluck meals, leftovers from catered events, snacks and treats, and special occasion foods.

Potluck 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. Here are some recommendations to help manage the challenges of potluck food:

- When food is made available in a common area and people are allowed to help themselves, limit the amount of time it is available. For example, it might be available 8:30–10:30 a.m. for breakfast items, or 11 a.m.–1 p.m. for lunch or snacks. After that time, put the food away.
- Explore other ways to celebrate special occasions besides providing unhealthy foods. Ideas include giving flowers to the honoree, offering fresh fruit or 100% fruit popsicles, holding a fun group activity off-site, taking a walking break, etc. Consider celebrating birthdays once a month instead of on each individual day.
- If there’s a sign-up list for a potluck occasion, make sure to suggest/include healthy options. Consider a potluck build-your-own-salad bar with a variety of healthy fruits, veggies, toppings, dressings, etc.
- Discourage foods that tend to have high amounts of added sugars, saturated fat and calories, such as donuts, cupcakes, brownies, muffins, pies, cakes, cookies and candy.
- Don’t place candy bowls in common areas. Replace candy with fresh fruit such as apples, oranges or plums.

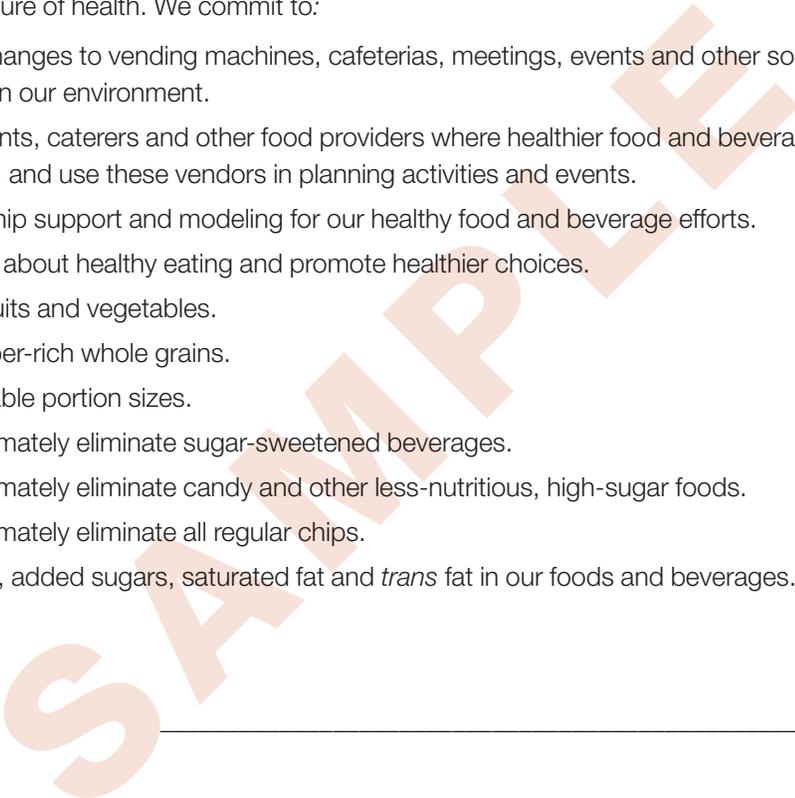
Be sure to communicate why you are making these changes; it will help gain community support and acceptance. You may need to provide specific guidance so people know what’s acceptable or preferred going forward.

This guidance is intended to help you provide healthier foods and beverages, which is one component of creating a culture of health. It does not guarantee specific nutritional levels or health outcomes. Following or implementing this guidance does not constitute compliance with any specific American Heart Association program requirements.

Healthy Community Food and Beverage Pledge

_____(NAME OF ORGANIZATION)_____ values the health of our employees, members and guests, and we want to create a culture of health. We commit to:

- Make healthy changes to vending machines, cafeterias, meetings, events and other sources of food and beverages in our environment.
- Identify restaurants, caterers and other food providers where healthier food and beverage choices are readily available, and use these vendors in planning activities and events.
- Provide leadership support and modeling for our healthy food and beverage efforts.
- Educate people about healthy eating and promote healthier choices.
- Provide more fruits and vegetables.
- Provide more fiber-rich whole grains.
- Provide reasonable portion sizes.
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate candy and other less-nutritious, high-sugar foods.
- Reduce and ultimately eliminate all regular chips.
- Reduce sodium, added sugars, saturated fat and *trans* fat in our foods and beverages.



Signature(s)

Printed Name(s)

Title(s)

Date

Sample Email to Community Members

TO: [AUDIENCE]

FROM: [SENIOR LEADER]

SUBJECT: Our Commitment to a Healthy Food Environment

We value the health of every member of our community and want to provide an environment in which you can thrive. We are committed to fostering a culture of health where healthy choices are the easiest choices. In the coming [WEEKS/MONTHS], we'll be making healthy changes to foods and beverages offered in vending machines, cafeterias, meetings and events.

With the help of our friends at the American Heart Association, we've committed to several ambitious goals, including:

- Reducing and ultimately eliminating sugar-sweetened beverages, candy and other non-nutritious foods.
- Reducing sodium, added sugars, saturated fat and *trans* fat in the food and beverages provided.
- Providing more fruits, vegetables and fiber-rich whole grains.
- Providing reasonable portion sizes.
- Identifying and using food vendors who offer healthier choices.

Making these changes will take time and cooperation. Our aim is not to take away personal liberties, but to create a healthier environment that will benefit us all. We value your support and feedback during this transition process.





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.

General Guidance

- Ensure that clean, cool water is always available at no cost. Water should be the default beverage for meetings and events.
- 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 model and promote healthy eating. You may also want to consider not providing between-meal snacks, such as those served during meeting breaks.

Healthier Snack Ideas

- Fresh fruit – apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, grapes, guavas, melon, oranges, papayas, 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 or matzah
- 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.
- When serving meals buffet-style, use smaller plates, which requires attendees to get up from the table and move around more often.
- 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 entrees are offered (such as on a buffet), make one entree fish (preferably oily fish). Include a vegetarian option when possible.
- 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.
- 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.
- Fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage, scrapple, chorizo or ham) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites
- Heavy, high-fat sauces such as Bordelaise, Hollandaise, Alfredo, cheese or 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 customers 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 organization. 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 others who are responsible for planning and ordering meals.

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.
- Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.
- 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 croutons, capers and olives.
- Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.
- 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





Vending machines are a highly visible source of food and beverages. Improving the nutritional quality of vending machine selections is an important step toward creating a culture of health.

Action Plan

Review current products in your machine(s) for compliance with nutrition standards below and note changes needed. (See the *Vending Machine Inventory Worksheet* provided as a supplemental tool.)

1. Contact your vendor.

- Determine your current contract specifics (products, signage, restrictions, etc.).
- Ask about healthy product options and new products.
- Provide a list of ideas/product requests to check availability and pricing.
- Request nutrition information as needed.
- Provide nutrition standards (below).
- Discuss transition timeline.

2. Involve community members.

- Send out an email and/or post signs about new, healthy options coming soon.
- Survey people for feedback about what types of healthy items they'd like to see offered.

3. Remove and replace unhealthy items as soon as feasible.

- Select the smallest package sizes offered by your vendor.
- Eliminate all candy (sugar-free mints and gum are OK).
- Eliminate all regular chips (baked chips and pretzels are OK).

- Eliminate or reduce desserts and sweet baked items, including but not limited to: cakes, cupcakes, cream-filled cakes, coffee cakes, cookies, donuts, muffins, sweet rolls and toaster pastries.
- Eliminate or reduce the number of sugar-sweetened beverages. At least 50 percent of the beverages available should be water, juice, milk and milk alternatives, and other acceptable beverages.
- See Nutrition Standards on next page.

4. Evaluate and communicate results.

- Usage reports from your vendor can show the popularity and acceptance of new items.

Healthier Product Ideas

- Dried fruit
- Apple sauce
- Canned fruit (in own juice or light syrup only)
- Nuts
- Trail mix (nuts, fruit and seeds only)
- Nut butter
- Whole-grain crackers
- Whole-grain pita chips
- Whole-grain rice cakes
- Light popcorn
- Oatmeal
- Graham crackers

Additional Recommendations

- Post calorie and sodium content for all items (from the Nutrition Facts label) on or near the machine so people can compare before they buy.
- Healthier items should be priced competitively or discounted, if possible.
- Healthier items should be prominently placed at eye level or in the most visible location.
- Any advertising/promotional signage or space on machines should only be used to promote healthier items.
- You may need to take a stair-step approach to implementing healthy changes. Start with small, easy steps and progress to more challenging ones over time as your community adapts to the new culture of health.

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

- No more than 200 calories per label serving
- Choose products with the lowest amount of sodium you can find and 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 you can find and no more than 140 mg of sodium per label serving.

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



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HEALTHY COMMUNITY FOOD & BEVERAGE TOOLKIT

Resources and Links



● American Heart Association

[American Heart Association Home](#)

[Heart & Stroke Encyclopedia](#)

[My Life Check](#)

[EmPowered To Serve](#)

● AHA Healthy Eating and Cooking

[Nutrition Center](#)

[Recipes](#)

[Simple Cooking with Heart](#)

[Heart-Check Food Certification Program](#)

[Sodium](#)

[Fats & Oils](#)

[Nutrition Facts Label](#)

[National Eating Healthy Day](#)

[Holiday Healthy Eating Guide](#)

● AHA Scientific Statements

[Diet & Lifestyle Recommendations](#)

[Population Approaches to Improve Diet,
Physical Activity and Smoking Habits](#)

[Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health](#)

[Defining and Setting National Goals for
Cardiovascular Health Promotion and
Disease Reduction](#)

[Heart Disease & Stroke Statistics 2014 Update](#)

● Workplace Wellness

[AHA Workplace Wellness Home](#)

[CDC Healthier Community Initiative](#)

● Other

[FoodSafety.gov](#)

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#)

[DASH \(Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension\)
\(NHLBI\)](#)

[U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
\(CDC\)](#)





Added Sugars: Sugar in food can be naturally occurring or added. Naturally occurring sugars are found in foods such as fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose). Added sugars include any caloric sweetener not naturally found in a food that is added during processing or preparation. Some common names for added sugars are: agave syrup, brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrate, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, raw sugar, turbinado sugar, trehalose and sucrose. [Learn more.](#)

Condiment: A food product that is added to other foods to impart a particular flavor, enhance flavor or complement the dish. It may be applied by the diner or added prior to serving. Traditional condiments such as ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard and soy sauce can be high in sodium, added sugars and/or saturated and *trans* fats, so they should be used sparingly, served on the side for the diner to apply, or substituted with healthier alternatives.

Daily Value (DV): A reference value on the Nutrition Facts label that tells you the percent of the recommended daily amount of each nutrient in a single serving, usually based on a 2,000-calorie per day diet.

Dietary Fiber: Dietary fiber describes several materials that make up the parts of plants your body can't digest. Whole grains and fruits and vegetables include dietary fiber, while most refined (processed) grains contain little fiber. Dietary fiber from whole grains, as part of an overall healthy diet, helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber-containing foods help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories and so may help with weight management. [Learn more.](#)

Fat-Free/Non-Fat: Products labeled fat-free must contain less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving. The FDA regulates the use of this term (and similar claims) by food manufacturers; check www.fda.gov/food for more details.

Legumes: Grain legumes (also called pulses) include beans, lentils, peas and peanuts. Legumes are typically good sources of protein and fiber.

Low-Fat: Products labeled low-fat must contain no more than 3 grams of fat per serving. The FDA regulates the use of this term (and similar claims) by food manufacturers; check www.fda.gov/food for more details.

Meal: A combination of foods and beverages intended for breakfast, lunch or dinner, which includes two or more items from recommended food groups (grains, dairy, protein, and fruits and vegetables) served in combination.

Non-Nutritive Sweetener: A food additive that duplicates the effect of sugar in taste, usually with less calories (sometimes called non-caloric sweetener). Some sugar substitutes are natural (stevia) and some are synthetic (aspartame, saccharin, sucralose). Those that are not natural are sometimes called artificial sweeteners. [Learn more.](#)

Nutrition Facts Label: An information panel required on most packaged foods and used by consumers to evaluate and compare nutritional value. In addition to the Nutrition Facts label, products may display other nutrition information or health claims on the package. Health claims are regulated by the FDA. [Learn more.](#)

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fats that your body doesn't make but needs to function properly. Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly EPA and DHA, have been shown to benefit the heart. They can decrease the risk of arrhythmias (abnormal heartbeats), decrease triglyceride levels, slow the growth rate of atherosclerotic plaque and lower blood pressure. [Learn more.](#)

Portion: The amount of a food or beverage served for consumption by one person at one time; sometimes called a serving or helping. Portion is a subjective amount and can vary. It does not necessarily equal serving size, which is a standardized unit of measuring foods. One portion may contain more than one label serving.

Reference Amount Customarily Consumed (RACC):

The amount of a food or beverage customarily consumed by one person at one time, as determined by the FDA/USDA. A standardized serving size used as the basis for values on a Nutrition Facts label, RACC is often, but not always, the same as the label serving size.

Serving/Serving Size/Label Serving Size: A

standardized amount of food or beverage, such as a cup or an ounce, used in providing nutrition information. Serving size is referenced on the Nutrition Facts label for ease of comparison of nutrition information. It is not a dietary recommendation. One package or container of food or beverage may contain more than one serving.

Snack: Food or beverage consumed between meals that tends to be smaller than a meal. This can refer to food served at a meeting break, items in vending machines or foods brought from home by employees.

Sodium: A mineral that helps regulate the body's water balance, maintains normal heart rhythm and is responsible for nerve impulse conduction and muscle contraction. Getting too much sodium from food and beverages contributes to high blood pressure in some people because it holds excess fluid in the body, creating an added burden on the heart. Excess sodium can also increase your risk for stroke and heart failure. Salt and sodium are often used interchangeably, but they're not exactly the same thing. Sodium is a mineral that occurs naturally in foods or is added during manufacturing or both. Table salt is a combination of sodium and chloride. By weight, it is about 40 percent sodium and 60 percent chloride.

Sugar-Sweetened Beverage: A beverage sweetened with various forms of sugar that add calories. Examples include soda, fruit drinks, sports/energy drinks, tea drinks and sweet tea.

Sugars/Total Sugars: The total amount of sugars in a food or beverage including those occurring naturally and those added during processing and preparation. The "Sugars" amount on the Nutrition Facts label currently includes both types, not just Added Sugars.

Vegetarian/Vegan: The *vegan* or *total vegetarian* diet includes only foods from plants: fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, seeds and nuts. The *lacto-vegetarian* diet includes plant foods plus cheese and other dairy products. The *ovo-lacto-vegetarian* (or *lacto-ovovegetarian*) diet also includes eggs. A *semi-vegetarian* (or pescetarian) diet may include seafood and poultry, and sometimes other meats on an infrequent basis. [Learn more.](#)

Whole-Grain: Grains and grain products made from the entire grain seed, usually called the kernel, which consists of the bran, germ and endosperm. Whole grains are generally good sources of dietary fiber. Examples include whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, whole cornmeal, brown rice and bulgur. Dietary fiber from whole grains, as part of an overall healthy diet, helps reduce blood cholesterol levels and may lower risk of heart disease. Fiber-containing foods such as whole grains help provide a feeling of fullness with fewer calories and so may help with weight management. [Learn more.](#)





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 Community 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.
- Substitute part-skim Mozzarella for queso Oaxaca and reduced-fat Monterey Jack for queso Chihuahua.

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, mayo, mustard, soy sauce) 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 brulee, 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.
- Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites.

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.*)



Sandwiches are common in the American diet and are an easy lunch option. Here are some tips for making a healthy and more delicious sandwich.

- Choose healthier ingredients and make smart substitutions.
- Request nutrition information, if available, and choose items with the lowest amounts of sodium, added sugars and saturated fat and no *trans* fat.
- Keep in mind portion/serving size. Cut large sandwiches in halves or quarters before serving.

Bread

- Request fiber-rich whole-grain breads.
- If serving on flat bread, pita, tortilla or wrap, ask for smaller sizes and whole grain.

Meat/Protein

- A serving of deli meat should be no more than 4 oz. (ideally 2 oz.).
- Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives including added nitrates/nitrites.
- Processed deli meats can be high in sodium. Check nutrition information if available and use varieties with the lowest amounts of sodium.
- Vegetarian proteins (beans, hummus, nut butters, tahini, tofu) can be a healthy alternative.

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 be better choices. Request extra-thin slices.
- Avocado or hummus can take the place of cheese for a dairy-free or vegan option.

Vegetables and Fruits

- Adding vegetables and fruits is a great way to make a sandwich healthier, tastier and more filling.
- Add sliced or shredded vegetables including beets, carrots, celery, cucumbers, onions, peppers, radishes, tomatoes and zucchini.
- Add sliced fruits such as apple, avocado and pear.

Condiments and Seasonings

- Traditional prepared condiments (mustard, ketchup, mayo) can be high in sodium, added sugars and fats. Offer them on the side.
- Healthier alternatives may include: fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto, salsa. (Check nutrition information, if available.)
- Use herbs, spices and salt-free seasonings to add flavor.





Healthier Cooking Methods



Healthy eating is more than just choosing good foods. How they're prepared is also important. Some cooking methods are better than others for cutting fat, cholesterol and calories while enhancing the nutritional value of the food. Avoid cooking methods that add unhealthy fats (saturated and *trans* fats) or let food cook in its own fat. (Deep-fat frying and pan frying are two examples.) Instead, request that food providers use these heart-healthy cooking methods.

Healthier Cooking Methods and Techniques

Bake: To cook in the oven. Food cooks slowly with gentle heat, causing the natural moisture to evaporate slowly.

Baste: To brush or spoon liquid over meat during roasting. This adds flavor and prevents drying out. Use fat-free liquids such as water, wine or lemon juice.

Blanch: To boil briefly. After 30 seconds in boiling water, plunge the vegetable or other food or into ice water to stop the cooking. This keeps it tender-crisp.

Boil: To cook food in heated water or other liquid, like broth, that is bubbling vigorously.

Braise or stew: To cook food slowly using heat from an oven or stovetop with a little bit of liquid, usually water or broth. Braising tenderizes the meat and enhances flavor.

Broil: To cook food directly under the heat source at a high temperature.

Brown: To quickly sauté, broil or grill at the beginning or end of meal preparation, to enhance flavor, texture or eye appeal.

Grill: To cook food on a rack directly over a heat source.

Marinate: To coat or immerse foods in a liquid mixture or dry rub before cooking.

Poach: To immerse in simmering liquid over direct heat. This is a good method for cooking fish.

Roast: To cook uncovered in the oven.

Sauté: To cook food quickly in a small amount of oil or liquid over direct heat.

Steam: To cook over boiling water in a covered pan. This helps keep foods' shape, texture and nutritional value intact.

Stir-fry: To cook small pieces of meat and vegetables quickly over very high heat with continual stirring, usually in a wok.

Food Preparation Tips

- Prepare food with minimal salt, if salt is needed at all. Use herbs, spices, salt-free seasoning blends, flavored vinegars, peppers, garlic and citrus juice/zest to add flavor instead.
- Drain and rinse canned meat/seafood, vegetables and beans to remove excess salt or oil.
- Trim all visible fat from meat before cooking.
- Use skinless poultry or remove the skin before cooking.
- Cook vegetables just long enough to make them tender-crisp. Overcooked vegetables lose flavor, color and important nutrients.



Guidance for Caterers and Food Vendors



American Heart Association Guideposts for Healthy Eating

- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Choose fiber-rich whole grains.
- Eat fish, especially those high in omega-3 fatty acids.
- Choose fats wisely. Eat less of the bad fats (saturated and *trans* fats) and replace them with better fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats).
- Limit sodium and added sugars.
- Limit processed meats.
- Eat nuts, seeds and legumes.

General Guidance on Meals

- Provide reasonable (not large) portions. Cut large portions in halves or quarters when possible.
- Prepare food with minimal salt, if salt is needed at all. Use herbs, spices, salt-free seasoning blends, flavored vinegars, peppers, garlic and citrus juice/zest to add flavor instead.
- Offer at least one fruit and/or vegetable serving every time food is served.
- If served, bread products should be whole-grain.
- Consider sides (or ingredients in dishes) such as:
 - Whole grains (quinoa, barley, wheat berry, bulgur, tabouleh, couscous)
 - Beans and legumes
 - Rice (black, brown, red, wild, mixed)
 - Pasta (whole grain)
- Drain and rinse canned meat/seafood, vegetables and beans to remove excess salt or oil.
- Grilled, roasted, broiled, baked and poached are usually the healthiest preparation methods.
- When serving meals buffet-style, use smaller plates.

Avoid serving:

- Regular soft drinks and sugar-sweetened beverages
- Bakery items, biscuits, corn bread, croissants, Danishes, muffins, pastries, etc.
- Fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites
- Sauces and gravies that contain a lot of sodium
- Sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, sour cream, cheese, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients
- Dishes with cheese as a key ingredient
- Butter
- Fried foods
- Chips
- Cookies and desserts

Healthier Sandwiches

Here are some tips for making a healthier and more delicious sandwich!

Bread

- Use fiber-rich whole-grain breads.
- If serving on flat bread, pita, tortilla or wrap, use smaller sizes and whole grain.

Meat/Protein

- A serving of deli meat should be no more than 4 oz. (ideally 2 oz.).
- Avoid fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives including added nitrates/nitrites.
- Processed deli meats can be high in sodium. Check nutrition information if available and use varieties with the lowest amounts of sodium.
- Vegetarian proteins (beans, hummus, nut butters, tahini, tofu) can be a healthy alternative.

Cheese

- Limit cheese, as it's usually high in sodium and saturated fat. Compare nutrition information; varieties such as mozzarella and Swiss may be better choices. Slice extra-thin.
- Avocado or hummus can take the place of cheese for a dairy-free or vegan option.

Vegetables and Fruits

- Adding vegetables and fruits can make a sandwich healthier, tastier and more filling.
- Add sliced or shredded vegetables including beets, carrots, celery, cucumbers, onions, peppers, radishes, tomatoes and zucchini.
- Add sliced fruits such as apple, avocado and pear.

Condiments and Seasonings

- Traditional prepared condiments (mustard, ketchup, mayo) can be high in sodium, added sugars and calories. Offer them on the side or in individual packets.
- Healthier alternatives may include: fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto, salsa. (Check nutrition information, if available.)
- Use herbs, spices and salt-free seasonings to add flavor.



Guidance by Food Category

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

Cheese

- Limit cheese, as it's usually high in sodium and saturated fat. Compare nutrition information; varieties such as mozzarella and Swiss may be better choices.
- 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.
- Substitute part-skim Mozzarella for queso Oaxaca and reduced-fat Monterey Jack for queso Chihuahua.

Chips

- Snack chips should not be served. Small amounts of whole-grain chips served with salsa or hummus (along with veggies) are OK.

Condiments

- Traditional condiments (ketchup, mayo, mustard, soy sauce) can be high in sodium, sugars and calories.
- Serve on the side or in individual packets.
- Healthier alternatives may include: fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto, salsa.

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.

Fruit

- Fruit can be served as a side or for dessert (if dessert is needed at all). Suggestions include seasonal fruit, fruit medley, fruit kabobs and mixed berries.

Meat, Poultry & 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 & 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 & 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.

Nuts

- Better choices are almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts.

Oils

- Cook foods 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 amounts of saturated fat.
- No partially hydrogenated oils or *trans* fats.

Pastas

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

Salads

- Prepare salads with interesting ingredients such as various types of greens, dried fruit, fresh fruit, avocado, nuts, seeds, red and yellow peppers, corn, 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.
- Avoid heavy, creamy dressings. Vinaigrette-type dressings are typically a healthier choice. Always include oil & vinegar made with a healthier oil as an option.
- Serve dressings on the side.

Sauces**(including Gravy)**

- Sauces don't need to be avoided completely. Sauces add flavor and may help keep meats and vegetables from getting too dry.
- 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 soup, check nutrition information if available and offer varieties with the lowest amount of sodium. Soup made from scratch is typically a better choice because you can control the amount of sodium. Use lots of vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes.
- "Cream" soups should be made with fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk.

Vegetables

- 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 citrus.
- Healthier cooking methods: grilled, marinated, roasted, steamed, stir-fried or sautéed in broth or with a small amount of healthier oil.

Yogurt

- No more than 20 g total sugars per standard 6 oz. serving.
- Offer fruit and/or nuts as toppings.

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 nutrition information is available.

Following this guidance does not guarantee specific nutritional levels or health outcomes and does not constitute compliance with any specific American Heart Association program requirements.





Beverages

- 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

Healthier Snack Ideas

- Fresh fruit – apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, grapes, melon, oranges, pineapple
- 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 and matzah
- 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/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

- 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.
- When serving meals buffet-style, use smaller plates.
- 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 entrees are offered (such as on a buffet), make one entree fish (preferably oily fish). Include a vegetarian option when possible.
- 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.
- 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.
- Fatty meats (such as bacon, sausage and salami) and meats preserved through smoking, curing, salting or other chemical preservatives, including added nitrates/nitrites
- Heavy, high-fat sauces such as Bordelaise, Hollandaise, Alfredo, cheese or 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