

Does your workplace promote healthy eating?

Most of us have good intentions when it comes to eating well, but knowing what a healthy choice is doesn't always translate into making a healthy choice. This can be especially true in the workplace where many of us spend a lot of time and where healthy options may be limited. For many of us, the struggle to eat healthy at work is not simply due to a lack of will power.

Research shows that our “food environment” strongly influences the food choices that we make. Think about the choices available to you in your workplace: What is stocked in the vending machines down the hallway? Does the cafeteria sell healthy choices? Are the healthy choices more expensive? Are the muffins served at meetings jumbo-sized? Is there an endless supply of candy, cookies, cakes, and pastries on the lunch room table?

We are more likely to eat foods that are easily accessible; even if we know those foods may not be the best choice. The food environment often overrides will power. When healthy choices are accessible, attractively displayed, comparatively priced and highly visible, it's a lot easier to make a better food choice.

Here are some simple things you can do to help create a healthier food environment in your workplace:

In the coffee room: Bring in a box of oranges instead of a box of donuts. Treat your co-workers to a bowl of apples or seasonal fruit.

At potlucks: Encourage people to bring colorful vegetable and fruit choices or vegetarian dishes using beans or lentils. Position the healthier options at the front of the table.

At meetings: Not all meetings require food. If a meeting is shorter than 2 hours or occurs during a non-meal time, ask yourself if providing food is really necessary. If providing food, remember that fruit and vegetable trays make great healthy snacks. Make these easily accessible by placing the trays in the center of meeting tables. If serving baked goods, provide smaller sized portions and cut muffins in half. Serve these items away from seated participants. For an all-day conference, fruit skewers and low-fat yogurt are tasty picks for the afternoon break. The Eat Smart Meet Smart resource can help you choose healthier food for meetings and events. See <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/healthyeating/pdf/eat-smart-meet-smart.pdf> .

In vending machines: Ask your vending machine operator to stock healthier choices. Check the brand name food list for healthier options to stock in vending machines. See <https://bnfl.healthlinkbc.ca/> .

For more information about healthy workplaces:

<http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca/home/articles/get-going-healthy-workplace>.

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