

Eat Smart Meet Smart



HOW TO PLAN AND HOST HEALTHY MEETINGS, EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

A PUBLICATION OF THE WESTERN AND NORTHERN CANADIAN COLLABORATIVE FOR HEALTHY LIVING



Eat Smart Meet Smart will help you plan meetings, events and conferences that are healthy for your participants – and healthy for your organization. Meetings, events and conferences are a central part of today's work world, and many involve food and drinks as well as long periods of sitting. This guide provides ideas for how you can make healthy food choices and add physical activities that will help keep participants alert, productive and engaged while at work, and encourage healthier choices at home, too.

What's in this guide

The following pages contain great tips for what to serve and how much to serve at meetings, events and conferences.

You'll find:

- tips on when and what kind of food you should serve
- sample menus for meals and snacks
- ideas for how to make your meetings “green,” and
- essential information about food safety.

You will also find ideas for how you can build in opportunities for participants to be physically active during any meeting, event or conference – short or long.

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It just **makes sense**

Serving healthy food and drinks at meetings, events and conferences just makes sense.

We spend at least eight hours of our day at work, five days a week, and often many of those hours are spent sitting in meetings. On the weekends, some of us go to even more meetings and events, conferences, seminars or workshops where we sit for even more hours – and, just like at work, often have little or no say in what we are served to eat and drink.

It makes both good business sense and good health sense to serve nutritious food and drinks wherever and whenever people gather together.

The food effect

Have you ever had a hard time keeping your eyes open during a PowerPoint presentation? Maybe it was what you ate before the presentation, rather than the boring slides.

What we eat and drink at meetings and other functions has a direct effect on how well we feel and how healthy we are. Food – the right food – gives us energy so we can work better, be more productive and actually enjoy our lives more, both on the job and at home.

Healthy choices

Canada's Food Guide explains that we need to eat a variety of foods from the four food groups to maintain a healthy body weight and receive all the nutrients we need for good health. According to the guide, as adults, we should be choosing:

- seven to eight servings of vegetables and fruit per day
- six to seven servings of grain products (at least half wholegrain), including bread, rice, pasta and cereals, per day
- two to three servings of milk and alternatives, such as cheese, yogurt, kefir and fortified soy drinks, per day, and
- two to three servings of meat – cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat – and meat alternatives, such as eggs, beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, nuts and nut butters, per day.

The healthiest food choices are:

- Low in fat. Everyone needs some fat, but too much fat and the wrong kinds of fat can make you gain weight and increase your risk of diabetes, heart disease and cancer.
- Low in salt. Eating too much sodium (salt) can raise blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke.
- Low in sugar. Sugar can increase your blood sugar levels, your weight and the fats (triglycerides) found in your blood.
- High in fibre. Eating a lot of fibre-rich foods can help lower your blood cholesterol levels, control your blood sugar levels and help prevent high blood pressure.



Everything in Moderation

Healthy eating is balanced eating. Healthy eating does not mean that everything you serve has to be low-fat, low-salt, low-sugar and high-fibre.

At your meetings and events, you can still offer the treat of a cookie or pastry now and then. Just make sure that you offer more choices that are healthy and fewer choices that are not. And that whenever you do serve the less healthy choices – such as cookies or pastries – you cut them in half.

When, what & how much to order

When to order

You may not need to order food and drinks for every meeting you hold. Consider offering food only at longer meetings or at meetings held during what would normally be a meal-time for participants, such as:

- between 7:30 and 9:00 am
- between 11:30 and 1:00 pm, and
- after 4:30 or 5:00 pm.

At other times – or for short meetings under two hours – you may want to offer drinks only. (Water should be available at all meetings.)

Remember to let participants know whether or not you are serving food and/or drinks.

What to order

When you are sure you need to order food for a meeting:

Feature vegetables and fruit

Packed with good nutrition, vegetables and fruit can also be tempting food choices. Why not:

- Serve washed and ready-to-eat fresh vegetables and fruit (watch for local berries in season), either on their own or with a low-fat dip or yogurt.
- Use fruit in salads or kabobs (fruit kabobs make a great snack or dessert), or for toppings on cereal at a breakfast meeting.
- Add raw, grilled or roasted vegetables to salads, sandwiches, pasta and soups.
- Provide 100% fruit or vegetable juices as well as water.
- Supply dried fruit, vegetable bars, or fruit cups for snacks, fruit pies, fruit cobblers, fruit squares or fruit tarts for desserts.
- Order a vegetable soup or salad for lunch or as the start to a hot meal, and at least one vegetable as a side dish with a hot meal.
- Plan a potluck salad bar for regular staff meetings, instead of the usual brown-bag lunch.



Serve lower-fat milk and alternatives

Milk and alternatives, such as cheese, yogurt, kefir and fortified soy drinks, are good sources of protein. They also provide a number of nutrients that are essential for strong bones and teeth. Choose to serve:

- 2% or less milk with tea or coffee
- 2% or less milk as a drink (chocolate milk is just fine, too), and
- low-fat (2% or less) yogurt cups or low-fat cheese (less than 20% milk fat) chunks or slices for snacks.

Highlight high-protein foods

High-protein foods can help boost energy levels and keep us more alert for longer. To increase protein without increasing fat:


- Serve tuna, char or salmon, lean chicken, turkey, ham, beef or other lean meat, low-fat cheese, eggs or tofu in sandwiches or as part of meals. (Fish and meat can be dried, canned or fresh.)
- Provide 2% or less milk or fortified soy drinks and yogurt at all meals and snack breaks.
- Offer bean soup or chili at lunch or a bean dip or hummus for snacks, with chopped vegetables or wholegrain crackers.
- Provide individual cups of trail mix made with nuts, dried fruit and wholegrain cereals as a snack.

Drinks such as pop, slushies, fruit-flavoured drinks, iced tea and lemonade contain a lot of added sugar. Instead, provide:

- pitchers or bottles of water (sparkling or plain)
- 100% fruit or vegetable juices, and
- 2% or less milk or fortified soy drinks.

Coffee and tea can be a healthy source of fluids – although people should limit their intake of caffeine to about 400 mgs a day, which is about 3-4 cups (250 mL) of coffee a day. Tea contains less caffeine. Make sure you also provide decaffeinated or herbal options, and:

- supply 2% or less milk and a sugar substitute, and
- avoid creamers and flavoured creams, coffee whiteners, packaged hot chocolate and apple cider mixes (real cocoa made with low-fat milk is okay).



**Water is
always
a good
choice.**

Emphasize healthy carbohydrates

Some carbohydrates – such as white breads, rice and pastas, cookies and cakes – can make us feel tired and unable to concentrate soon after we eat them. Other carbohydrates – such as vegetables, fruit, whole grains and low-fat dairy products – do just the opposite: they provide our bodies with the long-lasting fuel we need to function properly throughout the day. Emphasize healthy carbohydrates at your meetings by choosing:

- wholegrain cereals, breads and bagels for breakfast
- brown rice and wholegrain pastas for hot meals or cold salads
- wholegrain bread or wraps for sandwiches, and
- wholegrain bars, muffins (bran or oatmeal, for example) and crackers for snacks.

Reduce added fat, salt and sugar

It might seem hard at first, but in fact it's very easy to reduce fat, salt and sugar in the food and drink we serve at meetings, events and conferences. To make simple but healthy changes to what you order:

- Ask for food to be prepared with little or no added fats and oils.
- Request meat, fish or poultry dishes to be baked, poached, grilled, steamed or broiled (never fried).
- Always offer a vegetarian option at meals.
- Ask for sauces and salad dressings (always low-fat and low-salt) to be served on the side.
- Ask for the bread in sandwiches to be buttered lightly or on one side only.
- Choose broth or tomato-based sauces and soups, rather than creamed.
- Offer fruit spreads for bread, muffins or bagels instead of butter or margarine.
- Avoid serving processed cheese and meat (bologna, bacon, pepperoni, etc.).
- Limit cakes, pastries, donuts, cookies and squares, and do not put out bowls of candy or mints on the meeting tables.

Offer smaller portions

For many of us, it's not what we eat but how much that's the problem. Many restaurants today automatically “supersize” their portions, and we've become used to thinking of these as the “correct” portion sizes. In fact, to be healthy, our portions should generally be much smaller. (Please see Canada's Food Guide for more information on portion sizes.)

Help your participants by:

- providing mini-bagels, cookies and muffins (or cutting larger ones in half)
- asking for sandwiches and wraps that contain only two slices of meat or poultry
- cutting cheese (low-fat, of course) into small squares or slices, and
- offering fruit juices and other drinks in maximum 1-cup (250mL) sizes only.



How Much to Order

It's always tricky trying to figure out how much to order for a meeting, event or conference. Too much, and it might go to waste; too little and some people may go hungry. Here are some basic guidelines:

FOOD/BEVERAGE	PER PERSON
FRUIT	1 piece of whole fruit ½ cup (125mL) sliced fruit or fruit salad 1 cup (250mL) 100% fruit juice
VEGETABLES	1 cup (250mL) raw, leafy vegetables ½ cup (125mL) cooked or fresh vegetables 1 cup (250mL) 100% vegetable juice
WHOLEGRAIN PRODUCTS	Bagel – 1 small or ½ large Bannock – 1 small or ½ large Muffin – 1 small or ½ large Bread – 2 slices 1 dinner roll ½ cup (125mL) low-fat granola ½ cup (250mL) pasta ½ cup (125mL) brown rice
MEATS AND ALTERNATIVES	3 ounces (100g) of meat, fish or poultry ¼ cup (60mL) nuts or seeds
MILK AND ALTERNATIVES	1 cup (250mL) low-fat milk ¾ cup (175g) low-fat yogurt 1½ ounces (50g) low-fat cheese
SANDWICHES/WRAPS/PITAS	1 sandwich on wholegrain bread ½ wholegrain wrap ½ wholegrain pita
SOUP	1 cup (250mL) broth or tomato-based
SALADS	1 cup (250mL) mixed greens or spinach
COOKIES AND SQUARES	1 small cookie or ½ large cookie 1 small square or ½ large square

Did you know?

Only one-third of Canadians eat the seven to eight daily servings of vegetables and fruits recommended by Canada's Food Guide. Eating vegetables and fruits helps maintain good health and keep energy levels high. It also helps protect against the effects of aging and reduces the risk of chronic disease.

Healthy Doesn't Have to Mean Boring

Eating is one of life's greatest pleasures, and eating healthy foods should be just as much of a pleasure as eating not-so-healthy ones. We've assembled a series of sample menus that allow for lots of choice – covering at least three of the four food groups at meals and two at snacks – as well as lots of good tastes.

Breakfast or Morning Snacks

For all-day conferences, meetings between 7:30 and 9:00 am, or over two hours:

Sample 1:

- Assorted fruit (whole or sliced) or fruit salad
- Wholegrain bread or bagels (small or cut in half) and/or low-fat, wholegrain muffins (small or cut in half)
- Peanut butter and/or low-fat cream cheese
- Fruit jam or jelly
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), 100% fruit juices and 2% or less milk.

Sample 2:

- Assorted sliced fruit or fruit salad
- Frittata made with spinach and mushrooms
- Wholegrain bread or bagels (small or cut in half)
- Fruit jam or jelly
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal) 100% fruit juices and 2% or less milk.

For mid-morning meetings over two hours or morning breaks in all-day conferences:

Sample 3:

- Assorted sliced fruit
- Low-fat yogurt (vanilla, plain and fruit flavours)
- Low-fat granola
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), 100% fruit juices.

Sample 4:

- Assorted whole fruit
- Low-fat cheese (less than 20% fat) and wholegrain crackers, water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), and 2% or less milk.

Tips for self-catered meetings

You probably don't need a professional caterer for smaller meetings or simple menus. Your local grocery store carries everything you may need to provide a healthy meal or snack. To make your work easier:

- Look for items that require minimal preparation, such as pre-cut fruit and veggies. They may be more expensive, but will save you time.
- Ask the deli department or bakery to slice foods for you.



Afternoon Snacks

For mid-afternoon meetings over two hours or afternoon breaks in all-day conferences:

Sample 1:

- Vegetable tray with low-fat yogurt and/or low-fat sour cream dip
- Trail mix or nut/seeds served in small cups
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), 100% fruit juices and 2% or less milk.

Sample 2:

- Fruit skewers
- Low-fat yogurt (vanilla, plain and fruit flavours)
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal).

Sample 3:

- Assorted whole fruit
- Low-fat cheese (less than 20% fat) and wholegrain crackers, or wholegrain tortilla chips with salsa or blackbean dip
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), and 2% or less milk.

Lunch or Dinner

Sample 1:

- Garden salad with low-fat dressings on the side
- Wholegrain sandwiches, pitas, wraps or tortillas, with fillings made from:
 - sliced chicken or turkey breast or lean meat
 - salmon, char, tuna or egg mixed with low-fat mayonnaise
 - vegetables with low-fat cream cheese or hummus
- Low-fat, wholegrain fig bars or fruit cobbler
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), 100% fruit juices and 2% or less milk.

Sample 2:

- Chickpea or lentil salad with vegetables
- Wholegrain rolls
- Assorted fruit with 2% or less yogurt dip
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), 100% fruit juices and 2% or less milk.

Sample 3:

- Lemon Mustard Chicken with Barley Pilaf and Ginger Orange Carrots*
- Baked Apples*
- Water, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal), and 2% or less milk.

* Recipes for these tasty and nutritious dishes are posted on Healthy U Alberta (www.healthyalberta.com).



Meetings that Last More than One Day

If your meeting or conference is scheduled to last more than one day, you will most likely be working with a caterer or a hotel chef to plan meals and snacks.

Be clear before you book with the caterer or chef that you want healthy food and drinks only. If the caterer or chef does not want to modify set menus or change cooking methods to provide the healthy food you have asked for, find another if it is an option.

Remember to stress that you do not want to serve the same foods to participants over and over again – healthy eating does not have to be boring eating!

You're the Boss

Ask your caterer or chef to avoid fried foods and to prepare all foods with as little fat, salt and sugar as possible.

Also ask your caterer/chef to serve:

- vegetables and fruit with every meal or snack
- wholegrain cereals, breads, pastas and brown rice
- smaller portion sizes for full meals
- mini bagels, muffins and cookies (or cut them in half)
- fresh fruit as a dessert option (with other desserts made with fruit or with fruit toppings)
- sauces, salad dressings and salad toppings – such as croutons or cheese – on the side
- a vegetarian option at every meal, and
- a fish entrée for at least one meal.



Did you know?

Health Canada estimates that there are 11 to 13 million cases of food-borne illness in Canada every year.

Making Your Meetings Both Safe and Environmentally Friendly

Food Allergies and Restrictions

Some people are allergic to certain foods, such as shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts and fish. Others need to restrict what they eat for religious or health reasons (for example, someone with high blood pressure may have been told to severely limit salt, while someone with diabetes must be very careful about his or her sugar intake). Still others may be vegetarians or vegans by choice.

To help make sure you meet the dietary needs of the people attending your meetings, events or conferences:

- For staff in your office, keep a file listing each person's allergies or dietary restrictions.
- For any employee at risk for a severe allergic reaction, ask for a copy of his or her emergency treatment plan so you know what to do in case of an accident.
- For visitors, ensure you have a selection of food and drink options that they can pick and choose from (naturally low-fat, low-salt, low-sugar selections, such as vegetables and fruit, are usually suitable for everyone).
- For registered events or conferences, make sure your registration forms have a space where participants can indicate any food allergies or dietary restrictions.

Food Safety

A food-borne illness may occur when a person eats food infected with disease-causing bacteria, viruses or parasites. The most common symptoms of a food-borne illness are stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches and/or fever. These symptoms may appear within a few hours or as long as a few days after eating contaminated food.

They usually last only a day or two, but the symptoms can linger as long as a week to 10 days. In severe cases of food-borne illness, the effects can be permanent.

Meat, chicken and turkey, seafood, eggs, vegetables and fruit, milk and milk products may all carry the germs responsible for food-borne illnesses. When you handle these foods, you may also transfer the germs to other foods, as well as to counters, tables, cutting boards or utensils.

To help prevent food-borne illnesses at your meetings, events or conferences:

- Make sure all food and drinks are delivered – at the right serving temperature (hot or cold) – just before serving time, and served within 30 minutes of delivery.
- Supply (or ask your caterer to supply) serving utensils for each dish.
- Make sure everyone responsible for preparing, displaying or serving food washes his or her hands well with hot water and soap before serving.



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- Supply (or ask your caterer to supply) serving utensils for each dish.
- Make sure everyone responsible for preparing, displaying or serving food washes his or her hands well with hot water and soap before serving.
- Keep cold food – such as salads and dairy products – cold (4° C or colder) by nesting dishes or bottles/milk containers in bowls of ice, or bringing out small quantities from a refrigerator at regular intervals.
- Keep hot food hot (60° C or warmer) by using chafing dishes, slow cookers or warming trays, or bringing out small quantities from an oven or microwave at regular intervals.
- Do not leave perishable food, such as cheese plates, prepared sandwiches or cut fruit and vegetables, at room temperature for more than two hours. After two hours at room temperature, throw all perishable food away.

Go Green

To promote “greener,” more environmentally friendly meetings:

- Choose reusable, washable plates, glasses, coffee cups, serving containers and utensils.
- Use cloth napkins if possible.
- Supply water in pitchers rather than bottles.
- Provide food, drinks and condiments in bulk containers rather than single servings to minimize waste.
- Place recycling containers in the room for cans, bottles and paper.

Eat Smart, Move Smart

Any meeting that lasts over an hour should have a physical activity break to keep participants fresh, engaged and energized. It's especially important to schedule regular activity breaks for meetings that stretch over many hours or days.

Activities for Any Meeting

To infuse energy (and fun) into any meeting, build time for physical activity into your agenda and:

- Encourage people to walk around the building (but not back to their desks!) or up and down the stairs for at least part of every break.
- Play up-tempo music during breaks so people can walk in time or even dance around the room if they'd like to. Or how about a group performance of the Macarena?
- Lead your group in a three or four-minute stand-up-and-stretch break, where everyone gently stretches their necks, shoulders, arms, hands, legs, feet and back.

Activities for Longer Meetings

For all-day or longer meetings, events and conferences:

- Schedule both short (see above) and longer, 20 or 30-minute physical activity breaks – perhaps at lunch – which might include a walk around the neighbourhood.
- Hire a professional leader to provide an early morning aerobics, tai chi or yoga class for interested participants (make sure you mention it in your registration forms).
- Advise participants of local gyms and fitness classes, walking routes, running or biking trails.
- Offer draw prizes for participants who manage to be physically active for at least 30 minutes each day of a multi-day meeting.



For More Information

An Eat Smart, Meet Smart Healthy Meeting Checklist is available online. Visit www.hss.gov.yk.ca and search Health Promotion or healthy eating.

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The Western and Northern Canadian Collaborative for Healthy Living
is a provincial/territorial partnership working together to
create health-promoting environments.



May 2015