

Create a Healthy Food Environment at Your Worksite!

Most working Americans eat at least one meal or snack at work every day. This makes the worksite nutrition environment a great target to improve employee health. In the past, most programs aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles focused on individual behaviors. However, there is increasing evidence showing that it is equally important to change the environment. When healthy foods are available it is easier for employees to make a healthy choice.



Why is a healthy food environment important?

In the last thirty years, whole foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains have been replaced with highly processed foods containing refined grains, sugars and fats in the American diet. The result has been soaring rates of obesity and Type-2 diabetes. In 2005, 59% of Minnesotans were overweight or obese and 6% had been diagnosed with Type-2 diabetes. Each year, obesity costs employers up to \$2485 per employee. These costs represent direct medical costs, lost productivity and days of lost work.

By providing nutritious options at work, the worksite can help employees make healthy choices each and every day. Studies have shown that for every dollar spent on health promotion at work, healthcare savings ranged from \$1.49 to over \$5. Health promotion programs such as creating a healthier food environment improves the work climate, improves recruitment and retention of employees, reduces absenteeism, increases productivity and much more. Most importantly, it improves the health of you and your employees.

Will employees buy healthy food?

Many worksites have vending machines that are stocked with items high in refined grains, sugar and fat. A 2007 study of bus garage employees in Minneapolis-St. Paul found that 52% reported it hard to get fresh fruits and vegetables at work. Research has shown that employees want healthier vending options and that these items can still make money for the employer. A recent study showed that reducing the price of low-fat vending items was associated with increases in sales of these items. Importantly, there was no negative effect on machine profits.

What can employers do to support healthier eating behaviors?

- Cafeteria foods - offer fair price healthy options in the cafeteria
- Vending machines - offer healthy options in all vending machines
- Snacks at meetings - limit snacks at meetings or offer fruits, vegetables and water
- Potlucks - encourage healthy potlucks or limit the amount of them
- Candy jars - encourage a "fruit" jar or basket
- Catered events - provide plenty of fruits, vegetables and low fat/low calorie options as a policy

What is the role of Eat Well Work Well?

Eat Well Work Well aims to be a resource for employers to create a worksite environment that is supportive of healthier food choices and lifestyles for employees. It provides the framework and necessary tools to incorporate a healthier food environment in worksites, including:

- General Worksite Wellness
- Vending
- Catering
- Cafeteria

www.eatwellworkwell.org

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