

Eating Well at Work – A Guide for Employers

INTRODUCTION

We spend a large percentage of our time at work, eating at least one main meal here, sometimes more. It's simple — if we don't eat well at work, we're going to run into trouble.

Encouraging employees to eat well at work will provide many benefits for your business.

Health promotion programs at work should be seen as an investment rather than a cost. Canadian research into cost-effectiveness of worksite health promotion programs shows a return of \$1.75 to \$6.85 for every dollar spent.¹

This document has been prepared to provide employers with some simple, easy to follow tips to help encourage and aid your employees to eat well at work. The resource section at the end of this document provides website links to more information on nutrition, healthy eating guidelines and physical activity.

Why eating well at work is important

- ✓ Employees who eat well at work will be healthier. Nutrition is one of the key factors preventing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.
- ✓ Your organisation will benefit from reduced absenteeism.
 - Healthier employees have fewer sick days.
 - A workplace wellness program can improve worker morale and reduce absenteeism.
- ✓ Better health results in increased productivity and greater job satisfaction.
 - When a workplace improves conditions for its employees, such as making healthy food choices available, it boosts worker morale, job satisfaction and productivity.
 - Healthy meal and snack breaks are a chance to rest and refuel and result in better concentration.
- ✓ Helps you work towards being an employer of choice by promoting a good corporate image and reputation
 - An organisation with healthier employees has a positive impact on its community and customers and can give a business that competitive edge.
 - An organisation that cares for its employees fosters stronger commitment and loyalty from employees.

¹ *Food at Work: Workplace solutions for malnutrition, obesity and chronic diseases* (2005). Christopher Wanjek. International Labour Organisation (ILO). *Guide to Nutrition Promotion in the Workplace*. 2002. Ontario Public Health Association.
www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating.

Why it's not so easy to eat well at work

- ✘ Long working hours and stress can lead to bad habits such as eating on the run or at the desk.
- ✘ Busy work schedules often mean we reach for the less healthy convenient options.
- ✘ Catering options at meetings and events usually provide few healthy choices.
- ✘ Vending machines are often stocked with unhealthy choices.
- ✘ Cafeterias often lack appealing, affordable and tasty food choices based on vegetables and fruit.
- ✘ Fundraising chocolates in the staff room are too tempting.
- ✘ There is limited access to fresh or filtered water.
- ✘ Shift work can play havoc with an employee's metabolism and appetite, and there is often limited or no healthy food available for purchase.
- ✘ Self-service facilities can lead to overeating of higher fat, higher kilojoule foods and unwanted weight gain.
- ✘ Frequent travelling for work can result in a reliance on takeaway foods that are high in fat, kilojoules and sugar.

Just one of these factors can lead to a pattern of overeating of high fat, high sugar and high kilojoule foods. This can lead to unwanted weight gain, higher blood fats and cholesterol, high blood pressure and other chronic disease risk factors.

MAKE IT EASIER FOR EMPLOYEES TO EAT WELL AT WORK

Help your employees plan to eat well at work by recognising and removing those factors that make it hard for them to eat well.

Consultation and policy development

- ✓ Consult with your staff
 - Do they think healthy eating is important?
 - Do they think it is difficult to eat well at work?
 - What are the barriers to eating well at work?
 - What ideas do they have to make eating well, easier?
- ✓ Get people on-side
 - Form a project team.
 - Talk to Union representatives.
 - Ask for staff volunteers to 'champion' the cause of eating well.
- ✓ Write a nutrition policy with staff
 - Create a one page outline of what you want to achieve and how you'll do it.
 - Discuss combining a nutrition policy with other health and wellbeing factors, such as supporting physical activity in the workplace.

Create a supportive workplace environment

- ✓ If you have a vending machine, include healthier options
 - Download *Healthy Options in Vending – A Guide for Tasmanian Employers* from the Eat Well Tasmania website (details at the end of this document).
- ✓ When catering for meeting or events, provide healthy options such as fresh fruit platters, sushi and salads. Include vegetarian and gluten-free options and make sure plenty of fresh water is available.
- ✓ Provide a bowl of fresh fruit in the lunch room, free or at cost price. Put it next to the fundraising or charity chocolate box

- ✓ Ask the supplier of the fundraising or charity chocolate box to provide healthier options, such as bags of mixed nuts and dried fruit.
- ✓ If you provide tea and coffee, provide alternatives such as herbal teas or de-caf. Provide reduce-fat milk or milk alternatives.
- ✓ Make fresh or filtered water available by installing a water cooler or water filter.
- ✓ Provide a dedicated eating area for employees and encourage them not to eat at their desks.
- ✓ Provide the basic appliances like a fridge, microwave and toaster in the lunch room.
- ✓ If you have an in-house cafeteria, invite an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) to review the menu and make suggestions for improvement
- ✓ Supply all business/pool vehicles with an esky and encourage staff to take healthy snacks and drinks with them when taking long intrastate trips. Provide a map with marked cafes and takeaways that provide healthy options.

Promote healthy choices in the workplace

- ✓ Put up posters of fresh produce or motivational images about healthy eating.
- ✓ Include a regular article on healthy eating and recipes in the employee newsletter – encourage staff to send in recipes.
- ✓ Invite a specialist, such as an Accredited Practising Dietician to conduct information sessions.
- ✓ Promote health targeted events such as Heart Week or Nutrition Week and encourage staff participation.

The strategies used to plan and implement activities to support staff to eat well are similar to those used to develop broader workplace health and wellbeing programs. As well as better eating, these programs can address issues such as smoking, physical activity, alcohol consumption and mental health. *Get Moving at Work* is a free guide to developing comprehensive workplace health and wellbeing programs that can help you develop a suitable program. The kit is available at www.getmoving.tas.gov.au

A word on workplace health competitions

Competitions at work can be a fun way to motivate employees in relation to healthy behaviours. For example, groups of employees can form teams to see who climbs the most flights of stairs in a week or month.

However, competitions that focus on the most amount of weight lost may be counterproductive. This is because sometimes people use unhealthy ways to lose weight (such as fasting or following fad diets). This weight loss is often unsustainable and people can feel bad when the weight is regained. A much better idea is to focus on eating behaviour rather than weight loss.

RESOURCES

These websites provide great information to help you promote a healthy lifestyle in your workplace.

Eat Well Tasmania

www.eatwelltas.org.au

Nutrition information with links to other sites and resources. Keep an eye on *News and events* for fruit and vegetable promotion ideas, including information and resources from the *Go for 2&5*[®] campaign, and hiring of fruit and veggie character costumes. Phone: 03 6223 1266.

Community Nutrition Unit, Department of Health & Human Services

www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/nutrition

The unit provides a lending library of nutrition resources and a range of brochures including advice on selecting healthier takeaway food items and healthy catering guidelines. Due to limited resources, staff are unable to provide talks in the workplace but can provide advice on changing menus and promoting nutrition in the workplace. Phone: 03 6222 7222.

Nutrition Australia

www.nutritionaustralia.org

Provides nutrition information, including FAQ on its website, it has also developed some workplace presentations on nutrition.

Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)

www.daa.asn.au

For information on how to access an Accredited Practising Dietician (APD) in your area, who can run nutrition sessions for staff or review menus.

Heart Foundation

www.heartfoundation.com.au

The Parents and Friends Association of Tasmania

www.parentsandfriendstasmania.asn.au

Home of the *Fruitful Fundraising* directory, which provides healthy fundraising ideas.

Premier's Physical Activity Council (Tasmania)

www.getmoving.tas.gov.au

Information and advice on encouraging physical activity in the workplace and developing workplace health and wellbeing programs that address issues such as smoking, nutrition, physical activity, alcohol and mental health.

Healthy@Work

www.healthyatwork.tas.gov.au

Workplace health and wellbeing program information for Tasmanian State Service agencies and employees.

The City of Hamilton Healthy Workplace – Healthy Eating (Canada)

www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/HealthandSocialServices/PublicHealth/Workplace/healthyEating

The City of Hamilton has created an excellent guide to promoting nutrition in the workplace that can be downloaded for free from its website.

