

1. Basic Guidelines for Offering Healthful Meals

You won't be sacrificing taste or quality or spending extra time and effort offering nutritiously balanced meals. Simple substitutions can cut fat, salt, and added sugar; increase the amount of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; and improve health significantly. Are you worried that your youth won't eat the food you serve because it is healthful? Don't be. If you offer it, they will probably eat it. Here are some easy-to-follow guidelines to help you offer healthful meals and snacks.

Offer breakfast

Breakfast is often called the most important meal of the day, and with good reason. Studies have shown that eating breakfast can increase attention span and concentration, decrease irritability, and improve physical and mental performance. Breakfast can be as simple as a glass of juice or milk, a piece of fruit, and a lowfat granola bar, or as elaborate as wheat toast, grits, and eggs. Taking time in the morning to fuel up on carbohydrates (found in breads, grains, fruits), protein (found in meat, milk and milk products, nuts, beans), and a small amount of fat (found in lowfat milk products, eggs, peanut butter) is the key to help ensure a sustained release of energy throughout the morning.

Serve fruits and vegetables

Based on the *MyPyramid Food Guidance System* recommendation for a 2,000-calorie diet, adolescents should get at least 2 cups of fruits and 2½ cups of vegetables every day. In 2005, 20 percent of students in grades 9-12 consumed 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Serve seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables, dried fruits or canned fruits in their natural juices, and 100% fruit or vegetable juices for nutrition and convenience.

Choose foods lower in fat

Limit high-fat meats (e.g., hamburgers, bacon, sausage), fried foods (e.g., fried chicken or fish, French fries), cakes, cookies, donuts, croissants, Danish pastries, and foods prepared with lots of mayonnaise, butter, oil, and added gravies and sauces. Cheese is also a source of saturated fat. Stick to reasonable amounts (1 to 2 oz.), and choose cheeses lower in fat such as lowfat (1%) cottage, part-skim ricotta, or part-skim mozzarella. A variety of other reduced-fat and fat-free cheeses are also available. Read your Nutrition Facts label to compare the % Daily Value for total fat and saturated fat and to choose foods with the lower value. Foods with 5% DV or less for fat and saturated fat contribute a small amount, while foods that have 20% DV or more for fat and saturated fat contribute a large amount. Keep intake of *trans* fat and cholesterol as low as possible.

Choose healthful beverages

Healthful drink selections include lowfat (1%) or fat-free milk and ½ cup servings of 100% fruit juices such as orange, pineapple, grape, or apple. If you want a fizzy drink, dilute juice with club soda. Inexpensive, thirst-quenching water is another healthful beverage choice.

Watch out for added sugars

Always check the ingredients for added sugars (e.g., corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, honey, fructose, or other ingredients ending in “ose.”). Foods that have added sugar as one of the first two ingredients are high in sugar content. Reduced-fat or fat-free foods may contain more sugar than their regular versions since manufacturers often add sugar and other substances to improve the flavor of lowfat products.

Choose breads, crackers, and cereals made with whole grains

Whole grains such as whole wheat, whole cornmeal, oatmeal, and rye are higher in fiber than products made with refined grains (e.g., white bread, plain bagels, saltines). Look for the word “whole” with the primary grain listed as the first ingredient in the ingredient list; in some instances the word “whole” does not precede the grain (e.g. oatmeal, brown rice, popcorn).

Watch out for portion sizes

If you serve a high-fat food or dessert, limit the portion size to a reasonable amount and allow only one serving. Refer to *MyPyramid’s* recommended amounts for all food groups.

2. Tips for Choosing Healthful Meals With Caterers

In some cases, a caterer may be involved in planning and preparing a meal for special programs and events. Since caterers are not always the best authority on healthy food choices, this would be a wonderful opportunity to get involved and work with the caterer to find out what foods are available and how they are prepared. Although you may not have complete control over each ingredient used in the preparation of catered meals, you can make specific requests and instructions to make a more healthful meal.

All you have to do is ask

Don't be afraid to ask about the availability of lowfat muffins, fat-free salad dressings, lean cuts of meat, vegetarian options, or more healthful preparation methods.

Some sample questions to ask your caterer include:

- Do you offer soft or tub margarine made from unsaturated oil, such as canola, safflower, sunflower, cottonseed, soybean, or corn oil, instead of butter?
- Do you offer fat-free or lowfat (1%) milk instead of whole milk?
- Do you offer vegetarian selections?
- Do you offer lowfat desserts (e.g., frozen yogurt, 100% juice pops, puddings, fruit salad, sherbet, or angel food cake)?
- Do you use lowfat cooking methods: baking, broiling, steaming, microwaving, sautéing, stir-frying, grilling, stewing, braising, boiling, or roasting?
- Do you offer foods prepared with unsaturated fats (safflower, corn, soybean, canola, sunflower, or olive oil) instead of saturated fats (butter; palm, palm kernel, or coconut oils; or lard)?
- Do you use cooking sprays to sauté foods?
- Do you trim visible fat from meat, poultry, or fish before cooking?
- Do you prepare your chicken without skin?
- Do you offer leaner cuts of meats (e.g., beef, “loin” or “round”; pork, “loin” or “leg”; chicken, “breast” or “tender”)?
- Do you offer bottled water, 100% fruit juices, and/or sugar-free beverages?

Be clear about your instructions

Simply mentioning the word “healthful” to your caterer does not provide enough information. Always give your caterer a detailed description of the foods and beverages you want and how you want them prepared. Your caterer is probably willing and able to accommodate your special requests. (Refer to Chapter 8, “Appendix 10,” for a sample *Menu Guideline Memo*.)

Examples of instructions include:

- Do not serve foods that have been fried, basted with fat, or cooked in fatty sauces and gravies.
- Trim all visible fat from meats and poultry before cooking.
- Remove skin on poultry products.
- Serve only lean cuts of meat (e.g., beef, “loin” or “round”; pork, “loin” or “leg”; chicken, “breast” or “tender”) prepared by: broiling, roasting, baking, grilling, poaching, braising/ stewing, or stir-frying with minimal oil.
- Use unsaturated oils (e.g., safflower, corn, soybean, canola, sunflower, or olive oil) for cooking meats.
- Do not use added butter, lard, fat back, cracklings, or animal drippings to prepare vegetables.
- Offer lowfat and fat-free salad dressings and make dressings available on the side.
- Use whole-wheat bread for sandwiches.
- Use lowfat mayonnaise or mustard on sandwiches.
- Serve 1% or fat-free milk with breakfast cereals.
- Use fat-free milk or chicken stock instead of butter to add flavor to mashed potatoes.
- Do not add salt to cook pasta or vegetables.

Sample Meals

Lunch/Dinner

Baked Chicken
Oven Baked Potatoes
Steamed Broccoli
Corn Bread
Fruit Salad
Water, 100% Fruit Juice, 1%
or Fat-free Milk

Lunch/Dinner

Turkey Sandwiches
(on whole-wheat bread
with lowfat cheese, mustard,
lettuce, tomatoes)
Pretzels
Carrot and Celery Sticks with
lowfat Ranch Dressing
Fruit
Water, 100% Fruit Juice, 1%
or Fat-free Milk

3. Tips for Planning Healthful Snacks

A healthful snack can provide important energy and nutrients for a growing adolescent. Whether you have the facilities to prepare snacks during meetings and events or you buy your snacks ahead of time, there are many healthful, nutritious, and affordable choices available. When choosing snacks for your programs, keep the following criteria in mind:

- Watch out for the fat content. Read your Nutrition Facts label to compare the % DV for fat and saturated fat and to choose foods with the lower % DV. Foods with 5% DV or less for fat contribute a small amount, while foods with 20% DV or more for fat contribute a large amount. Choose foods with little or no *trans* fats and keep cholesterol intake as low as possible.
- Check the ingredients. Is sugar one of the first two listed? Are there other forms of added sugar (e.g., corn syrup, honey, or fructose)? Look for whole-wheat or whole-grain flour rather than refined flour or white flour.
- Look at the vitamin and mineral content. Foods with 20% DV or more contribute a large amount of a nutrient, while foods with 5% DV or less contribute a small amount of a nutrient.

Sample Healthful and Affordable Snacks

Whole-wheat Bagels with lowfat or fat-free Cream Cheese,
100% Juice (no added sugar) Juice Box

Lowfat Granola Bar, Fat-free Pudding Snacks

Graham Crackers (4 sheets) w/Peanut Butter, Banana

Fruit Smoothies (fresh or canned fruits, lowfat or fat-free yogurt,
100% juice, ice)

Receiving Reimbursement for Your Afterschool Program

USDA allocates funds for afterschool programs to provide nutritious, well-balanced snacks to youth. Cash reimbursement for snacks served to children through the age of 18 is available through USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) for programs that:

1. Provide children with regularly scheduled activities in an organized, structured, and supervised environment;
2. Include educational or enrichment activities; and
3. Are located in a geographical area served by a school in which 50 percent or more of the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

CACFP also reimburses for suppers served in afterschool care programs in seven States -- Delaware, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. To receive reimbursement for suppers, afterschool programs in these States must meet the same criteria that are described above for snacks.

Snacks and suppers that are served by programs operating under the at-risk afterschool component of the CACFP are reimbursed at the free rate and must be served free of charge to children.

For more information, please contact the agency that administers the CACFP in your State (usually the State Department of Education). State agency contacts are listed at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd.

Additional Guidance

Additional guidance on offering healthful meals, tips for choosing healthful meals with caterers, and tips for planning healthful snacks can be found on the following Internet Web sites:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/pdf/Healthy_Worksite_Food.pdf
2. New York State Department of Health
www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/prevent/guidelines.htm
3. Seattle and King County Public Health
www.metrokc.gov/health/nutrition/meetings.htm
4. University of Minnesota – School of Public Health:
www.sph.umn.edu/img/assets/9103/Nutrition_Guidelines.pdf
5. Cooperative Extension Service – Hawaii
www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/new/Newsletters/HealthyMeetings.pdf
6. New York State Department of Health
www.nysphysicalactivity.org/news/docs/150.pdf