



# EAT SMART NORTH CAROLINA:

*Guidelines for  
Healthy Foods and Beverages  
at Meetings, Gatherings  
and Events*



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**T**his guide is for anyone who is in charge of events where food is served. Making simple changes to the foods and drinks you offer gives North Carolinians healthier options that they can enjoy. “Eating smart” does not mean every single food you eat (or serve) has to be low in calories or high in fiber. It emphasizes balancing less-healthy foods and drinks with healthier ones. It also means serving portions that support good nutrition without too many calories.

## *Imagine a North Carolina where:*

- **healthy foods are offered at potlucks, meetings, faith functions and community events. This includes fruits, vegetables and lower-calorie options. Water is always available to drink.**
- **caterers, restaurant owners and other food and drink companies provide healthy foods and drinks in healthy amounts for customers.**
- **employees can choose healthy foods in meetings and trainings.**
- **foods and beverages are served in smaller portions.**

## **Why Should We Be Worried?**

Our food choices, lifestyle and surroundings all affect our health. We know that choosing the right foods can prevent diseases and help us live better lives. Most North Carolinians’ diets are low in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and are high in saturated fat and sugars. Eating a steady diet of unhealthy foods and drinks is associated with four of the 10 leading causes of death: heart disease, some types of cancer, stroke and type 2 diabetes. These four conditions accounted for 196,285 hospital admissions (21% of all admissions) and over \$8.5 billion in hospital charges (28% of total hospital charges) in North Carolina in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

## **We Can Make a Difference**

The NC Division of Public Health and NC State Extension developed the following guidelines to help meeting planners choose lower-calorie and more nutritious foods and drinks for events. As users of this guide, we can model our commitment to good health by making our meetings and events healthier, and sharing that vision with others across our state. By following these guidelines, you can improve your own health and the quality of your life. You may also reduce your risk for long-term diseases such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Think about all of the food-related events you are involved in (e.g., meetings, trainings, suppers at your faith community, fundraisers, luncheons, receptions ), and promote good health by using the suggestions listed in this guide.

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1. North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, State Center for Health Statistics. Inpatient Hospital Utilization and Charges by Principal Diagnosis and County of Residence, North Carolina, 2014. Third report listed under Morbidity section. Accessed at [www.schs.state.nc.us/data/databook](http://www.schs.state.nc.us/data/databook) on November 19, 2015

1

**Offer healthy food choices at breakfasts, lunches, dinners, potlucks and receptions.**

There are many healthy and tasty options for foods and beverages. Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and high in vitamins, minerals, fiber and flavor. Portion sizes are important too. Offer smaller portions of foods. Provide lower-calorie beverages—water, low-fat milk and unsweetened teas. Offer baked, roasted or grilled meats and fish, served with vegetables.

2

**Offer only healthy foods at mid-morning or mid-afternoon meeting breaks.**

Think twice about whether or not it's necessary to offer food at breaks during meetings, presentations and seminars. Help create a norm that food does not have to be everywhere. If you do provide food, offer only fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts with no added sugar and/or other healthy options. Better yet, offer a physical activity break instead.

3

**Identify and promote healthier food and beverage providers.**

Healthy options can be purchased in many places including restaurants, grocery stores, farmers' markets, caterers and food distributors. Once you have identified businesses that are willing to provide high quality, healthier foods at a reasonable price, compile and share that information with others in your community. For example, if you have worked with a caterer who has been willing to adjust their menu offerings or recipes to include whole grains or increase vegetable options, share that caterer's name with others. Promoting these businesses with friends and colleagues helps business grow, and it sends a message into the community that healthy foods and beverages are a priority. In turn, these vendors may begin to carry more items and may be able to provide them at a lower cost.

4

**Keep food safe to eat.**

From farm to table, everyone shares the responsibility of keeping food as safe as possible by washing hands and surfaces often; separating raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods while shopping, preparing and storing; cooking and chilling foods to a safe temperature; and serving foods safely. Your local health department or cooperative extension office can provide you with up-to-date food safety information.



5

**Lead by example.**

Show your participants or employees that you are concerned about their health and well-being. Sign the *Eat Smart North Carolina Healthy Foods Policy* (see page 7), and challenge other members of your community to implement the policy too. Lead by example by preparing healthy meals at home and selecting healthy foods when you dine out. Build physical activity into your events as well. Encourage physical activity in your organization and “walk the talk” yourself. Visit [EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com](http://EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com)



for other ways to promote healthy eating and physical activity wherever you live, learn, earn, play and pray.

# SUGGESTIONS for Foods and Beverages

Suggestions listed below represent healthier choices than what is often served at meetings and events. The healthiest options are marked with a ★. Make every attempt to include some of the healthiest items and always include water.

## BEVERAGES

- ★ Water—always include water as an option
- ★ Skim or 1% milk
- ★ Soy milk with no added sugar
- ★ Coffee—regular and decaffeinated
- ★ Tea—regular and herbal teas; hot or cold; unsweetened
- ★ Sparkling water with no added sugar



## SNACKS

- ★ Fresh fruit
- ★ Raw vegetables
- ★ Whole-grain crackers
- ★ Hummus
  - Cheese cut into 3/4" squares or smaller
- ★ Nuts with no added sugar
- ★ Yogurt
  - Pretzels with mustard dip
  - Tortilla chips with salsa
  - Popcorn
  - Fig bars
  - Animal crackers
  - Graham crackers

## BREAKFAST MEETINGS

- ★ Fresh fruit
- ★ Raw vegetables
- ★ Nuts with no sugar added
- ★ Yogurt
  - Bagels cut in half or fourths
- ★ Whole-grain bread
- ★ Whole-grain English muffins
- ★ Peanut butter
  - Whole-grain waffles
  - Whole-grain French toast
  - Mini-muffins
  - Granola bars



## Tips for Lowering Calories

### Selecting Foods

- Prepare lunch entrées with no more than 700 calories and dinner entrées with no more than 800 calories per person.
- Ask the caterer to use lower-fat preparation methods, to serve added fats like dressings or condiments on the side, and to provide you with the number of calories in entrées if available.
- Select items that are broiled, baked, grilled, or steamed rather than fried or sautéed.
- Choose entrées in tomato-based sauces rather than cream, butter or cheese sauces.
- Include fresh fruit.
- Include at least one vegetable—fresh or cooked, with no butter or cream sauces added.
- If dessert is offered, it should be served in small portions.

### Preparing Foods

- Serve salad dressings on the side, and offer oil and vinegar or vinaigrette dressings.
- Consider serving baked, broiled, or oven-fried chicken or grilled fish.
- Season greens, cabbage and string beans with smoked turkey instead of fatback or salt pork.
- Substitute a lower-fat dressing or use less mayonnaise when making potato salad, macaroni salad and chicken salad.
- Select leaner cuts of meat. Remove the skin from chicken before you cook it.
- Skim fat from gravies before serving.



When choosing healthy options for an event, some lower-calorie options should be offered. Low-fat choices are sometimes suggested because they are lower in saturated fat and lower in calories than the full-fat version.

## CATERED LUNCHES & DINNERS

- ★ Lean meats, poultry, fish or shellfish—grilled, broiled or poached
  - Sandwiches on whole-grain bread
  - Soups made with vegetable puree or skim milk
- ★ Garden salad with dressing on the side—offer at least one vinaigrette or oil and vinegar
  - Pasta salads made with oil and vinegar or vinaigrette dressing
- ★ Beans or tofu
- ★ Baked potatoes with vegetable toppings
  - Whole-grain breads/rolls
- ★ Vegetables—raw or cooked, with no butter or cream sauces
- ★ Fresh fruit
  - Avoid fried foods or cream sauces
  - If dessert is offered, serve in small/mini portions

### Box Lunch Sandwich Ideas

- ★ Whole-grain breads or pita wraps prepared without butter/margarine, mayonnaise or salad dressing
- ★ Lean meats, poultry or marinated tofu
- ★ Toppings of lettuce, spinach, peppers, tomatoes, onions, pickles
- ★ Fresh fruit

It is a good practice to offer at least one vegetarian option with meals.

## CATERED RECEPTIONS

- ★ Grilled chicken skewers
- ★ Shrimp cocktail
  - Miniature meatballs made with lean meat
- ★ Mushroom caps with lowfat cheese
- ★ Whole-wheat pasta, tofu or raw vegetable salads marinated in oil and vinegar or vinaigrette dressing
- ★ Garden salad with dressing on the side—offer at least one vinaigrette or oil and vinegar
- ★ Fresh fruit
- ★ Raw vegetables with hummus
- ★ Nuts with no added sugar
  - Other snacks from “Snacks” list
  - Portion-controlled desserts such as sheet cake cut into small 2" squares, small slices of angel food cake served with fruit, mini cupcakes



# SAMPLE MENUS

## Breakfast

- Bagels cut in fourths or mini-muffins (choose whole-grain)
- Reduced-fat cream cheese
- Assorted fresh fruit (sliced honeydew and cantaloupe, grapes, bananas, sliced oranges)
- Peanut butter
- Low-fat milk (1% or less), unsweetened soy milk
- Coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal)
- Water

## Healthy Break

*Consider replacing a food break with a physical activity break, or include a physical activity break with the following:*

- Whole fruit
- Mixed nuts with no added sugar
- Yogurt
- Water
- Coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal)

## Casual Lunch/Dinner

- Grilled chicken sandwich on whole-grain bread with lettuce, tomato and pickle
- Fresh fruit
- Pretzels/baked potato chips
- Water, skim or 1% milk, soy milk with no added sugar, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal)

## Formal Lunch/Dinner

- Baby spinach salad with fresh strawberries and seasoned pecans (raspberry vinaigrette dressing on the side)
- Baked pork chops with peach salsa
- Baked sweet potato
- Collard greens (prepared without bacon or ham)
- Mini-cupcake or fruit skewers
- Water, skim or 1% milk, soy milk with no added sugar, coffee (regular and decaf), tea (regular and herbal)

## Guidance for Working with Caterers

### Getting Started

You can use the sample script below when you first call a caterer, hotel or restaurant about your event.

We are looking for a caterer for \_\_\_\_\_ (*event name, date, time*) and are committed to offering our meeting/event attendees healthy options. We'd love to work with you if you'd be able to provide a menu/selection that aligns with our healthy meeting suggestions. Would you be willing to adapt your standard menu to include some healthier options?

### Emphasizing the Key Points

Express to the caterer that you want to provide:

- Water
- Whole-grain options
- Fruits and vegetables
- Condiments and dressings served on the side
- No/limited fried foods and cream sauces
- Smaller portion sizes for desserts (if dessert is served)

### Asking for Alterations, Additions and Replacements

Check the caterer's standard menu to see if it already includes healthier options. They may be able to make a few simple changes to better follow the suggestions (e.g., replace white bread with whole-grain bread, serve dressings and condiments on the side, increase fruit and vegetable offerings, cut desserts in half). You may want to provide them with a copy of this guide so, they can look over the suggested foods and beverages to design a healthy menu.

# Eat Smart North Carolina *Sample Healthy Foods Policy*

For use within any organization/agency or community group where foods or beverages are served.

## Whereas:

\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in your worksite, faith community, etc., name here)  
is concerned about the health of our \_\_\_\_\_ (employees, members);

## Whereas:

People have become more and more interested in eating smart and moving more;

## Whereas:

Heart disease, diabetes, stroke and some types of cancer—which can decrease life expectancy and quality of life—are largely affected by what we eat and how active we are;

## Whereas:

Foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grain breads and pastas, and low-fat dairy products are better choices for preventing many diseases;

## Therefore:

Effective \_\_\_\_\_ (today's date), it is the policy of \_\_\_\_\_  
(your organization's name) that all activities and events where food and beverages are provided (e.g., meetings, trainings, potlucks, community events, etc.) that are sponsored or supported by this organization will always include opportunities for healthy foods and beverages by:

### 1. Serving foods and beverages outlined in *EAT SMART NORTH CAROLINA: Guidelines for Healthy Foods and Beverages at Meetings, Gatherings and Events*

This includes always providing water as well as following suggested guidelines based on the type of meal or snack served. Guidelines promote fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, whole grains, and lean proteins, and limit fried foods and large portions.

### 2. Identifying healthy eating opportunities

This includes using restaurants, caterers and farmers' markets, where healthy food choices are readily available and sharing the names of these businesses with other community members.

### 3. Providing encouragement from group leadership to enjoy healthy foods

This includes community promotion of healthy lifestyles and group leaders modeling healthy behaviors by selecting healthy food choices.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Organization

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why should we consider offering healthy foods at meetings?

Eating healthy is a big step toward better health. People have differing food needs based on health concerns or taste. Offering healthy choices, including smaller portions, takes into consideration all of your employees and members as they make food choices.

### Can I still bring birthday cake?

The goal of the healthy meeting guide is to provide healthy choices for all participants. You may still want to bring a special treat from time to time for celebrations. We suggest you offer smaller portions of desserts and also offer a healthier option such as fruit.

### Will healthy meetings cost more?

Healthy foods are not always more expensive. Offer reasonable portion sizes, order less food to reduce waste, and consider not always offering food at every break. If you are working with a caterer, ask for suggestions of healthier options that fit your budget. If you are not working with a caterer, buy fruits and vegetables in large containers and try shopping at warehouse stores that may be less expensive.

### What if my caterer does not offer mini versions of muffins or desserts?

You can ask the caterer to cut the standard portions in half. This may even save you money and reduce food waste.

### Can I still serve soft drinks and sweet tea?

It is important to make sure water is always available. You may want to provide other no- and low-calorie drink options such as flavored seltzers, coffee and unsweetened tea. We suggest you limit sugar-sweetened beverages (e.g., sweet tea, regular soft drinks). By replacing sugar-sweetened beverages with water and other low-calorie beverages, you make it easier for your employees and participants to make a healthy choice.



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