

Promoting healthy eating at work

A guide for employers



Why promote healthy eating at work?

Promoting healthy eating is part of promoting health in the workplace.

Research has shown that the benefits of improving health in the workplace include:

- increased motivation of employees and a better working atmosphere, leading to more flexibility and better communication;
- increased quality of products and services, more innovation and creativity, and a rise in productivity;
- improved public image of the company, making it more attractive as an employer.

Poor nutrition is associated with increased risk of conditions such as heart disease, some cancers, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis and compromised oral health. It is also associated with obesity.

In Northern Ireland, the majority (59%) of adults are either overweight or obese. Obesity is estimated to result in 260,000 working days lost each year and costs the economy £500 million. By promoting healthier eating, you can reduce absenteeism rates in your workplace.

Any organisation, large or small, can take simple action to promote healthy eating and gain the benefits listed. As an employer, you can make the healthier choice the easier choice.

What action can be taken?

You can make simple changes and put measures in place to encourage healthier eating.

You don't have to have a company canteen – just the enthusiasm to make things happen. And remember, changing eating habits and taking part should be voluntary; not everyone may want to participate.

In the workplace, management and employees should work together to ensure that:

- clean, bright, surroundings, separate from work areas, are available for lunch time and breaks;
- crockery and utensils are provided;
- suitable arrangements are in place to keep the eating/cooking area clean;
- there are suitable facilities for washing utensils, eg sink and washing up liquid/dishwasher;
- there is appropriate food storage for packed lunches, eg providing a fridge can help prevent food-borne illness and reduce sickness absence;
- facilities are available for safe reheating/cooking of food;
- there are suitable facilities for hand washing, eg soap, clean towels;
- there are adequate facilities for those working on evening/night shifts or off site;
- drinking water facilities are available throughout the workplace.



For employers with a canteen or other food provision

Offering healthier food options helps employees to make healthier choices.

Types of food provided

Offer a wide choice of fruit, vegetables and breads; main ingredients should include rice, pasta or potatoes; offer fish and chicken often; include a variety of vegetarian options which use peas, beans, lentils, eggs or quorn.

Ingredients used

Use a variety of fresh/frozen/tinned fruit and vegetables; use low fat products when available, eg semi-skimmed milk, low fat spreads, low fat yogurts; reduce amount of salt in cooking and remove it from the table; use oils and sugar sparingly.

Food preparation/cooking methods

Trim visible fat from meat; skim fat off soup, stock and mince; avoid preparing vegetables far in advance, storing for long periods before serving, or over-cooking; use grilling, steaming, boiling, casseroles, poaching, dry roasting and stir frying; avoid deep fat frying wherever possible.

Displaying and promoting food

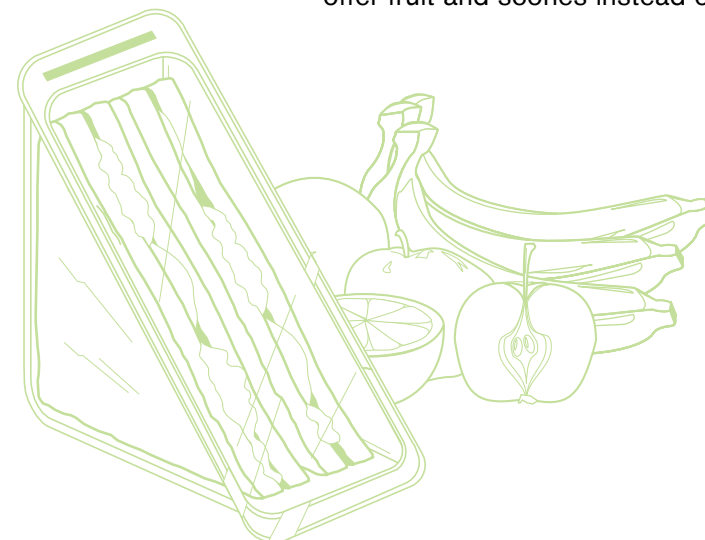
Ensure salad bars, fresh fruit and a selection of breads are prominent in the serving area; make baked potatoes more visible than chips; offer salad dressings separately; feature details of new recipes in any menu and ensure healthier options are not more expensive. For more information on healthy catering practices, please visit: www.food.gov.uk/northern-ireland/nutrition/healthy-catering/

Using external caterers

Outside caterers can help you provide healthier options.

Contracts with outside caterers for tea/coffee/snack services, finger buffets/working lunches, boardroom catering or vending machines should ensure that healthier food options are always available, for example:

- caterers should include sandwiches with a mixture of wholemeal and white bread, a little low fat spread and a limited selection of mayonnaise-type fillings;
- encourage the addition of salad wherever possible and serve dressings separately;
- vending companies should include bottled water, fruit juices, packs of fresh or processed fruit in juice, plain nuts or rice cakes in their vending machines;
- buffet food should have a selection that is not deep fried;
- offer fruit and scones instead of buns and biscuits.



Promoting healthy eating among employees

Promoting healthy eating doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming.

- Provide information and guidelines on nutritional content, ingredients and methods of cooking where appropriate.
- Take part in local healthy eating campaigns and publicise this on posters, leaflets, intranets, screen savers, payslips and through employee meetings.
- Provide healthy recipes for packed lunches.
- Offer 'taste and try' days.
- Have themed healthy eating weeks or days, eg breakfast, pasta, fruit.
- Give employees the option of contributing to a weekly fruit order from the local greengrocer.
- Open a healthy 'tuck-shop'.
- Run information sessions or workshops for employees on healthy eating, nutrition and cookery.
- Support employees who are trying to eat healthily or lose weight, eg encourage them to form a support group or join a programme such as Weight Watchers or Unislim.
- Consult with an outside specialist in nutrition or dietetics to offer nutrition or healthy eating seminars.

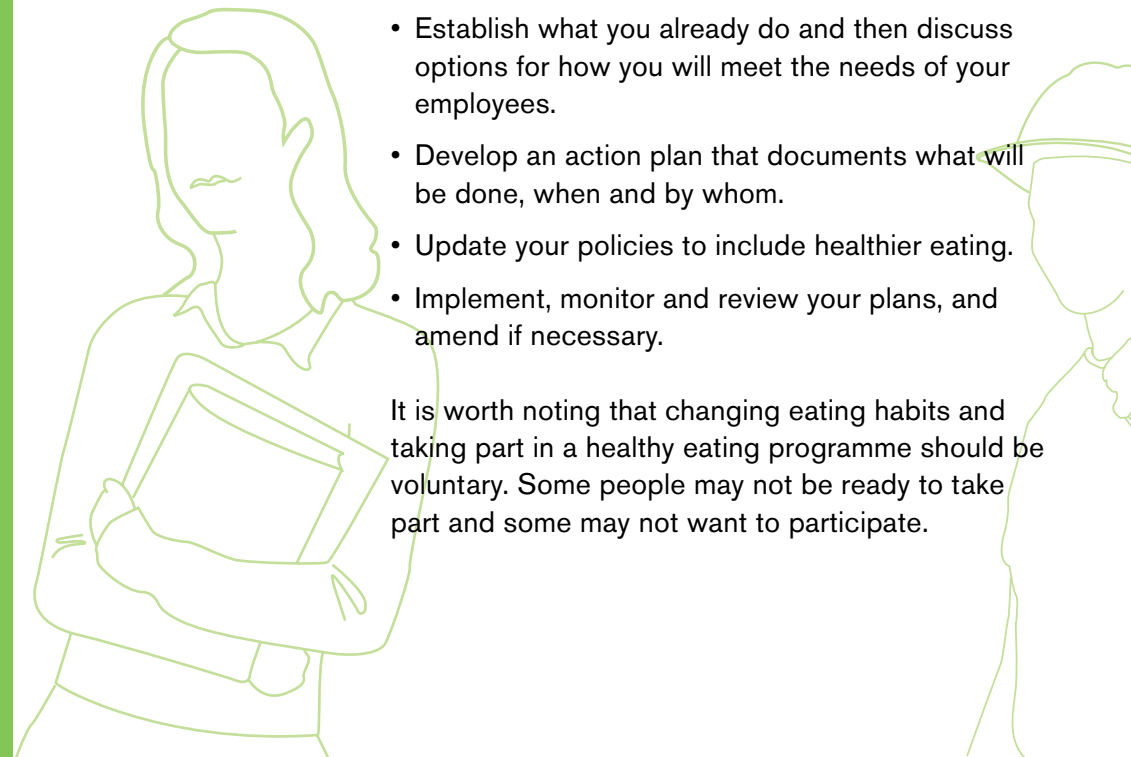
Key steps for action

For successful change, consult, communicate and plan.

It takes dedication and commitment to implement healthy workplace programmes. After starting a healthy eating programme in your workplace, you may find the following steps helpful.

- Depending on the size of your organisation, set up a working group.
- Consult, communicate and involve everybody in your workplace, including management, employees and trade unions. Determining the needs and wishes of staff is an essential part of the process. If a workplace healthy eating programme is going to be successful, it has to reflect what employees themselves consider important. Consider suggestion boxes, meetings or informal discussions to allow employees to share their views.
- Establish what you already do and then discuss options for how you will meet the needs of your employees.
- Develop an action plan that documents what will be done, when and by whom.
- Update your policies to include healthier eating.
- Implement, monitor and review your plans, and amend if necessary.

It is worth noting that changing eating habits and taking part in a healthy eating programme should be voluntary. Some people may not be ready to take part and some may not want to participate.



Help is at hand

Supporting the health and wellbeing of employees involves assessing their needs. The Public Health Agency has an online health assessment tool, available at:
www.healthatworkni.org

To find out more about workplace health and wellbeing support, visit: www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/health-and-wellbeing-work-resource-guide

For written information on healthier eating contact the central health promotion resource service in your local Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) area. Details can be found at www.publichealth.hscni.net

Below you will find information on websites which may be useful sources of information:

www.bda.uk.com

www.bdaweightwise.com

www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating

www.healthyliving.gov.uk

www.nutrition.org.uk

www.safefoodonline.com



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