

Promoting healthy eating at work

A simple 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 almost half of all men and more than one third of women are overweight, while a further one fifth of men and one quarter of women are classed as 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.

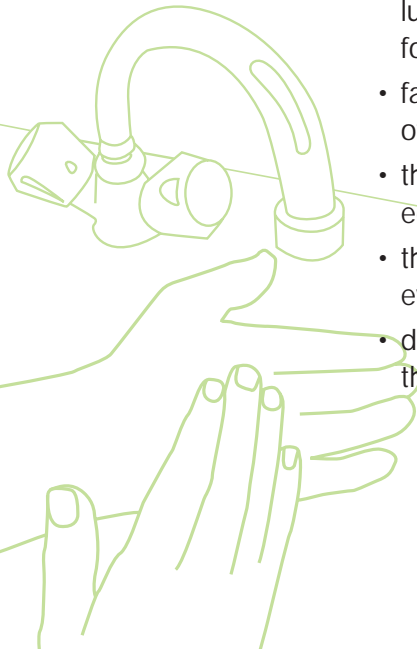
What action can be taken?

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, smoke-free 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

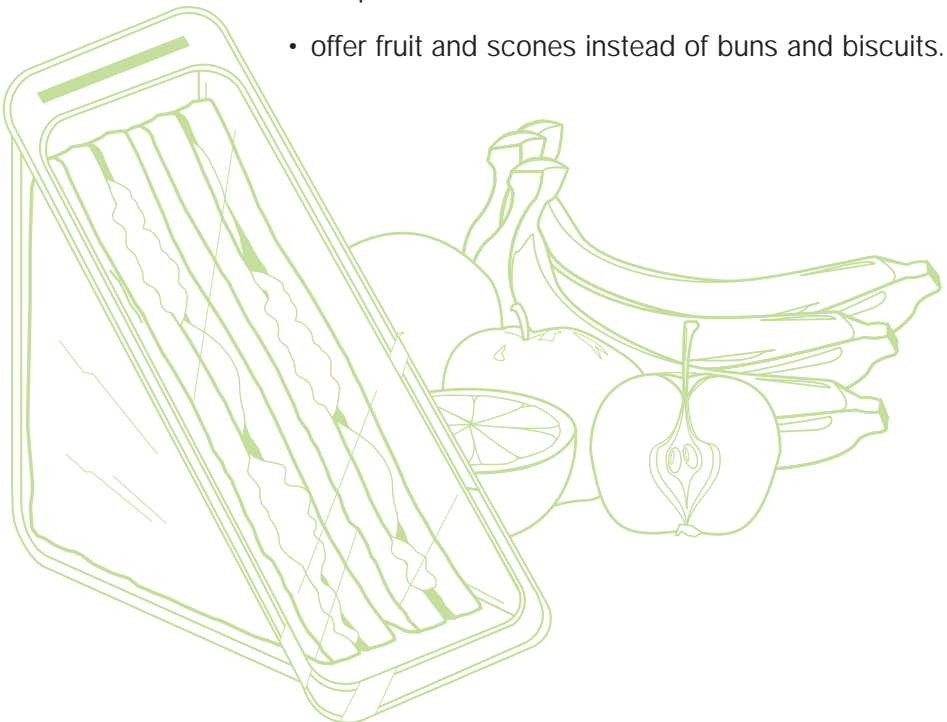
Ensure salad bars, fresh fruit and a selection of breads are prominent in the serving area; make baked potatoes more visible than chips; offer salad dressings separately; feature details of new recipes in any menu and ensure healthier options are not more expensive.

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:

- 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;
- 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

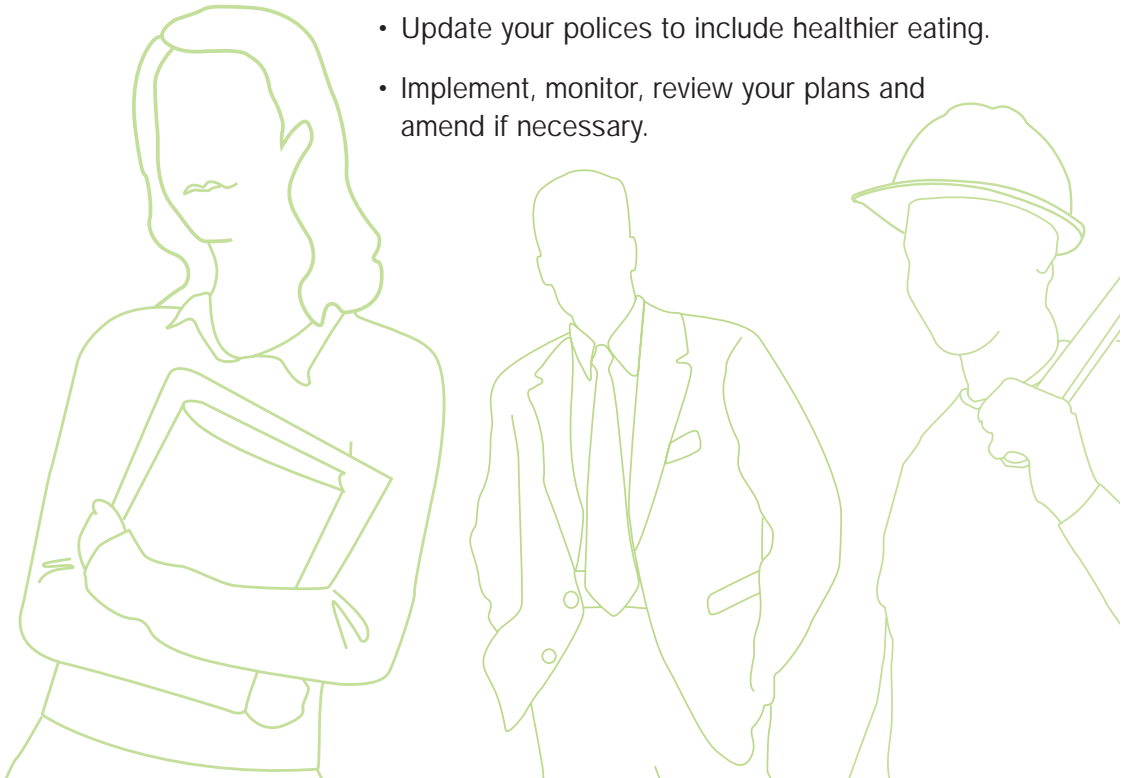
Promoting healthy eating doesn't have to be expensive or time consuming.

- Offer 'taste and try' days.
- 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.
- 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.

Key steps for action

For successful change, **consult, communicate and plan.**

- Consult with an outside specialist in nutrition or dietetics.
- Depending on the size of the organisation, set up a working group.
- Consult, communicate and involve everybody in your workplace including management, employees and trade unions.
- Establish what you already do and then discuss options for the way forward.
- Develop an action plan which documents what will be done, when and by whom.
- Update your policies to include healthier eating.
- Implement, monitor, review your plans and amend if necessary.



Help is at hand

For written information on healthier eating contact the central health promotion resource service in your local Health and Social Services Board area. Details can be found at www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk

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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Promotion
Agency**



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Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland
18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.
Tel: 028 9031 1611 (voice/minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.
www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk