



Introduction & Background

Topics Included

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Five Steps to Healthy Eating
4. Nova Scotia Government's Commitment to a Healthy Workplace
5. Literature Review
6. References

Introduction

If you have picked up this resource, you are most likely a member of a healthy workplace committee, a manager or a health professional who is interested in making healthy eating a part of your workplace. You may also be keen to promote the importance of healthy eating with your co-workers. If these are your objectives, then you have the right resource!

This resource is divided into six main sections:

- Introduction and Background
- Supportive Environment and Policy
- Education and Awareness Raising
- Skill Building
- Communication Materials
- Additional Resources

The **Introduction** contains information on the resource itself. The **Background** provides the rationale for offering workplace healthy eating programs, as well as key nutrition messages that can be promoted in such programs.

The next five sections provide tools that can be used to plan and deliver healthy eating programs in the workplace.

The **Supportive Environment and Policy** section contains topics that are linked to the physical and social work environments. It provides suggestions for getting the support of managers and supervisors and creating surroundings and conditions at work that support healthy eating.

The **Education and Awareness Raising (learning about healthy eating) and Skill Building (learning how to eat healthy)** sections contain healthy eating topics. Each of these topics is explored under the following headings:

- Purpose
- Intended Audience
- Suggested Activities
- Diversity Checklist
- Materials

The **Diversity Checklist** is a resource that has been included in the beginning of the Supportive Environment and Policy, Education and Awareness Raising and Skill Building sections. It provides guidelines to help you make your sessions welcoming and inclusive for all participants. Use the checklist when you are planning healthy eating activities for your workplace.

The **Materials** entry for each topic is a listing of handouts, PowerPoint presentations, etc., that you will need to implement the activities for that topic. Some materials must be ordered from different sources, and some have been included in the guide.

The **Communication Materials** section includes brief messages relating to topics covered in the Education and Awareness section. These messages may be printed and displayed as table tents, posted on your department's Intranet site, and/or published in your newsletter.

The **Additional Resources** section contains extra materials and resources that you may need to carry out the suggested activities. It includes a sample and blank copies of the *Healthy Eating in the Workplace Promotion Planning Worksheet*, a *Healthy Eating in the Workplace Action Plan Worksheet*, and a *Participant Evaluation Form*, which will be helpful in planning and evaluating activities. Also included are *Participant Pre and Post Evaluation Worksheets for Education and Awareness Raising and Skill Building*. Use these worksheets to collect data before any activities have been implemented and then after a period, for example, of six months up to a year, once some of the topics and related activities have been covered. Finally, there is the *Implementer's Evaluation Worksheet*, which is meant to be completed by those who have been involved with implementation of the *Healthy Eating in the Workplace* program and forwarded to the Public Service Commission, Healthy Workplace.

The **Additional Resources** section includes information on how to contact a dietitian, recommended books and websites, URLs for all the fact sheets and handouts included in the guide, and hard copies of some of the brochures and information sheets that will be required to implement activities from other sections.

Background

Five Steps to Healthy Eating Programs

It takes dedication and commitment to implement healthy workplace programs. Health Canada¹ outlines a five-step process to promote health in the workplace. Upon starting a healthy eating program in your workplace, you may find the following steps to be helpful.

Step 1

Build Commitment

Involving members from all the different groups in your workplace will help to ensure that your plan will be accepted. Is your committee made up of different representatives? Do managers and employees outside of your committee buy into promoting healthy eating in the workplace? You may want to promote the benefits of healthy eating in the workplace by staging an event, posting information around the workplace, and/or talking informally about it with co-workers.

Step 2

Find Out What Employees Need and Want

Assessing and understanding employees' needs and preferences is an essential part of the process. If a workplace healthy eating program is going to be successful, it has to reflect what employees themselves consider to be important. Some methods of determining employee needs and preferences are informal discussions, a suggestion box, an employee meeting, and a survey of co-workers. Remember changing eating habits and taking part should be voluntary. Not everyone will be at the same stage of readiness and some may not want to participate.

Step 3

Put Together a Plan

A healthy eating promotion plan helps to chart your direction for the future (see Additional Resources for the *Healthy Eating in the Workplace Promotion Planning Worksheet*). Set out some short-term goals (e.g., six months to one year) and some long-term goals (e.g., one to two years). Revisit the plan once in a while to see where you are and what has been achieved. You may have to plan some minor or even major changes. Some of the topics in this resource should fit with your short-term and long-term objectives. Implement some of the suggested activities over a one to two-month period (longer or ongoing in some cases). The *Healthy Eating in the Workplace Action Plan Worksheet*, which is listed in the Materials section of each topic, is a helpful tool for planning and coordinating activities.

Step 4

Put Activities in Place

Follow your plan and get things moving. Promote your initiatives by putting the Activity/Session Promotion Posters (See the CD and Additional Resources, p. 223.) around the workplace, by advertising through your workplace e-mail, or by word of mouth. Try to use different health promotion approaches— supportive environment and policy, education and awareness raising, and skill building. “Mix and match” your approaches. For example, you may decide to try some activities related to Food Guide Basics (Education and Awareness Raising section) and then one month later (or at the same time) try some activities on Setting and Achieving Healthy Eating Goals (Skill Building section). Meanwhile, you may have already tried some activities related to manager/supervisor support; catering; cafeterias, canteens, and other eateries; vending machines; and/or fundraising (Supportive Environment and Policy section).

Step 5

Follow Up and Revise Your Plan

Once your healthy eating program activities are up and running, you will want to know what is working and what is not. Reviewing your activities can help to improve what you are already doing and justify continuing or expanding activities. It does not have to be difficult or time consuming. In fact, it can be as simple as keeping a record of how many people attended activities and asking for their comments and suggestions for change. The participant evaluation form, that is included in the materials list for each topic, is a helpful tool for assessing and modifying activities. Adjusting your plan helps to keep everyone moving forward and feeling successful. Celebrate your success!

Nova Scotia Government’s Commitment to a Healthy Workplace

The Government of Nova Scotia recently approved its corporate Healthy Workplace Policy,² which formally establishes government’s long-term commitment to a healthy workplace. It provides the framework that will guide all healthy workplace–related activity and program development, as well as future health-promoting policies. Some departments have already adopted healthy catering guidelines, which lay the groundwork for policy development around healthy eating.

The Nova Scotia government has adopted the National Quality Institute’s (NQI) comprehensive Healthy Workplace™ approach,³ which takes into account three core elements: health and lifestyle

practices, physical environment and occupational health and safety, and workplace culture and supportive environment. The guiding principles of our Healthy Workplace Policy provide a link between a healthy work environment and an organization's success, the many factors that influence an individual's health, the need for departments to be given the flexibility to address the unique needs of their employees, and the need for participation by employees at all levels.

Through their deputy heads, departments are assigned responsibility in the policy for supporting the Healthy Workplace Advisory Committee, establishing active healthy workplace departmental committees and programs that respond to the needs of their employees, and reporting their progress on establishing healthy workplace initiatives. Indeed, the formation of healthy workplace committees is an integral part in building a healthy workplace.

With this policy in place, capacity is built across government to champion the creation of a healthy, safe, and supportive work environment for its 10,000 plus employees.

Literature Review

Workplace Health: A Comprehensive Approach

The workplace is a contributing factor in the health of its employees. An ideal workplace is one that positively affects employees' health, thereby, reducing absenteeism, sick leave, medical costs, employee turnover, and job injury rates. Implementing health promotion strategies in the workplace have been shown to be an effective means of achieving these outcomes.⁶ With 385,000 Nova Scotians (41% of the province's population), spending more than half of their waking hours at work, it is vital that employers find ways to positively influence various factors in the workplace, which can have an impact on employees' health.^{7,8}

According to NQI's Comprehensive Healthy Workplace™ approach, the role of the workplace in influencing the health of employees can include the following:

- Individual health and lifestyle practices include mental health, physical activity; eating habits, sleep habits, smoking, and alcohol and drug abuse.

- Workplace culture and supportive environment include, but is not limited to, work/life balance; the organization and design of work; a sense of control over one's work; positive and respectful relationships with co-workers, supervisors, and clients; adequate training; a sense of fairness and fun at work; and access to support during difficult times.¹
- Physical environment and occupational health and safety refer to the quality of the physical work environment, which has an impact on the health and well being of employees. It includes elements such as noise control, air quality and ergonomics and involves working in partnership with occupational health and safety programs.



National Quality Institute's Three Elements of a Healthy Workplace™³
(Used with the permission of the National Quality Institute.)

A comprehensive workplace health program—one that focuses on all three of these factors—can also address various risk factors for chronic conditions, including stress, tobacco use, physical activity, and nutrition.⁸

Canada's Food Guide

In 2007, Health Canada introduced the latest version of *Canada's Food Guide* to help Canadians determine the amount and type of food to eat every day.

The guide recommends that we base our diet on four food groups: vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, and meat and alternatives. Any foods not described by these food groups are termed "other" and should be eaten in moderation. Into this category falls a small amount (2–3 tablespoons/30–45 ml) of unsaturated fat each day, including oil used in cooking, salad dressings, margarines, and mayonnaise.

This guide reflects the preferences of a diverse Canadian population when it comes to making choices from among those groups. The amount of food a person needs each day depends on his or her age, body size, gender, activity level, and for women, whether she is pregnant or breastfeeding. The four food groups and the ranges of recommended number of servings vary by age and gender.

Please refer to *Eating Well With Canada's Food Guide*⁴ for complete information on the current recommendations. Also available is a nationally tailored food guide reflecting the foods and traditions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis⁵.

Note: *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* may also be referred to as *Canada's Food Guide* in this resource. A copy of *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* is included in the Additional Resources section and information on ordering more copies are included under Food Guide Basics in the Education and Awareness Raising section.

Healthy Eating in the Workplace

Why focus on healthy eating in the workplace? Here are some facts.

- Healthy eating can help to lower a person's risk of developing chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some types of cancer. Nova's Scotia's rates of these conditions are among the highest in Canada.
- Heart disease, stroke, and diabetes are responsible for half of all deaths in Nova Scotia.

- The incidence of diabetes and circulatory system diseases in Nova Scotia is the second highest in Canada.
- 39% of Nova Scotian adults are overweight (BMI greater than 27) compared to 32% nationally.
- After cigarette smoking, obesity (BMI greater than 30%) is recognized by experts as the second-leading preventable cause of death and is the prime factor in the development of chronic diseases and conditions, such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and hypertension^{9,10}

Most Canadians do consider nutrition to be an important factor when making food choices. According to the 2004 *Tracking Nutrition Trends V* survey, 71% of English-speaking Canadians said that nutrition is an important consideration for choosing the food they eat.¹¹ Despite this finding, the eating practices of many Canadians do not seem to be consistent with this claim. In another study, *Food Habits of Canadians*, the following was revealed:

- More than half of all adults did not consume the minimum recommended number of servings of vegetables and fruit or of milk products daily.
- Almost one-third of all adults did not consume the minimum recommended number of servings of grain products daily.
- Almost half of all adult women did not consume the minimum recommended number of servings of meat and alternatives daily.
- Food choices from “other foods” contributed to over one-quarter of energy and fat intake for all adults.¹²

Based on the Canadian Community Health Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada between 2000 and 2001, fewer than 35% of Canadians and 29% of Nova Scotians over the age of 12 eat the recommended number of servings of vegetables and fruit every day.¹¹ This is alarming, considering that research indicates that eating a variety of vegetables and fruit every day could decrease one’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease, stroke, and certain cancers.

Workplace Nutrition Programs

Workplace nutrition programs can play an integral role in fostering and supporting employee health. The use of existing channels of communication, social networks, and administrative systems in the workplace can generate program interest, facilitate follow-up, and help to create a supportive environment for healthy eating. Support and encouragement from co-workers can help to reinforce positive eating behaviours. In addition, knowledge and skills learned at work, can in turn; influence family members, friends, and the home setting.⁸

Workplace nutrition programs can also play a role towards achieving a healthy corporate philosophy—one that believes that employee health is an integral part of the business, that people are an organization's most important resource, and that every employee, at every level, has a unique contribution to make.⁸

Key Nutrition Messages to Promote in the Workplace

*Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*⁴

- Eat the recommended amounts and types of food each day.
- Eat at least one dark green and one orange vegetable each day.
- Choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no added fat, sugar, or salt.
- Have vegetables and fruit more often than juice.
- Make at least half of your grain products whole grain each day.
- Choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar, or salt.
- Drink skim, 1%, or 2% milk each day.
- Select lower-fat milk alternatives.
- Have meat alternatives such as beans, lentils, and tofu often.
- Eat at least two Food Guide Servings of fish each week.
- Select lean meat and alternatives prepared with little or no added fat or salt.
- Include a small amount of unsaturated fat each day.
- Satisfy your thirst with water.
- Limit foods and beverages high in calories, fat, sugar, or salt.
- Be active every day.

Healthy Eating Nova Scotia

Healthy Eating Nova Scotia, a strategic plan to address nutrition-related health issues, was developed by the Healthy Eating Action Group of the Nova Scotia Alliance for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity in partnership with Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection. Vegetable and fruit consumption has been identified as one of the four priority action areas. The three objectives of this area are:

- to increase consumption of vegetables and fruit among all Nova Scotians;
- to increase the availability of vegetables and fruit in community, work, school, and health-care settings; and
- to improve access to and affordability of vegetables and fruit for low-income populations.

Another priority action area for Healthy Eating Nova Scotia is food security. Food security relates not only to food affordability but to food accessibility and availability as well. The objectives of this area are

- to increase the proportion of Nova Scotians who have access to nutritious foods; and
- to increase the availability of nutritious, locally produced foods throughout the Province.

These two areas are related, because an obstacle to eating the recommended daily servings of vegetables and fruit is cost. For many of the working poor or those living on income assistance, healthy eating is a struggle.

Two additional priority action areas of Healthy Eating Nova Scotia are breastfeeding, and children and youth. One of the objectives related to the breastfeeding area is to increase its initiation and duration. It is recommended that healthy term infants receive only breast milk for the first six months of life, continuing up to two years and beyond, with the addition of healthy solid foods at six months. A mother is more likely to breastfeed if she encouraged to breastfeed and if doing it is made as easy as possible. Families, employers, businesses, local governments, and health and child-care facilities may all be involved in creating environments that support breastfeeding. With respect to children and youth, the objectives revolve around improving eating patterns of children and youth, based on *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*⁴; increasing knowledge and skills about food and nutrition among parents and other caregivers of young children; and increasing the availability and affordability of healthy foods in child-care, school, and other child and youth settings.⁹

Healthy Eating Nova Scotia and the Workplace

The workplace is an ideal setting to promote healthy eating. It provides a captive audience and various on-site opportunities for positively influencing employees' food choices. Moreover, the workplace presents a convenient means of reaching the adult population. Since full-time working adults spend about 60% of their waking hours at work, they are likely to eat at least one or more meals and/or snacks per day in the workplace.¹³ Promotion of healthy food choices in eateries (cafeterias, canteens, and restaurants in or near the workplace), in vending machines, at business functions, and in fundraising ventures can help to build a supportive environment for healthy eating practices.⁸ Emphasis on the availability of nutritious, locally produced foods (in particular, vegetables and fruits), as well as on the accessibility of healthy food for all employees in the workplace would contribute to achieving the objectives outlined in the priority action areas of fruit and vegetable consumption and food security. In addition, creating a supportive environment for breastfeeding in the workplace and increasing the healthy eating knowledge and skills of employees who are parents would help to achieve some of the objectives outlined in the remaining two priority action areas of Healthy Eating Nova Scotia.

A Healthy Eating Strategy for Capital Health¹⁴

Capital Health exists within the largest integrated academic health district in the Maritimes, known as the Capital Health District, which is one of Nova Scotia's nine health districts. Capital Health provides core health services to 395,000 residents, or 40% of the population of the Nova Scotia, and tertiary and quaternary acute care services to residents of Atlantic Canada. Specialized adult health services are provided to a referral population from the rest of the province of 550,000 and to residents of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Capital Health employs 9,985 staff members.

The Healthy Eating Strategy is linked to the commitment Capital Health has made to create a healthy workplace. A goal within this strategic direction is to adopt a comprehensive approach to healthy eating at Capital Health that represents a strategic approach to improving the nutritional health of employees. The Healthy Workplace Department and Food and Nutrition Services co-lead a diverse team in the development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of a Healthy Eating Strategy for employees, physicians, volunteers, and visitors.

In a June 2004 employee survey, 81.4% of respondents said they were interested in learning more about healthy eating, and 82.9% of respondents said they were interested in participating in healthy eating initiatives. The Healthy Eating Nova Scotia provincial strategy provided guidance in the development of Capital Health's Healthy Eating Position Statement, which was presented to and approved by the Executive Management Team in June 2005. (A copy of the Healthy Eating Position Statement is included in the Supportive Environment and Policy section of this manual.)

The healthy eating position statement led to the development of Capital Health's Healthy Eating Strategy, which has four key components: Healthy Eating Guidelines, Food Choice Availability and Accessibility, Promotion, and Education. Ultimately, the goal of this strategy is to encourage employees, physicians, volunteers, and visitors to make healthy food choices that enhance their nutritional health and reduce their risk for chronic disease.

References

1. HealthWorks: A “How-To” for Health and Business Success. Health Canada. 1999.
2. Healthy Workplace Policy. Nova Scotia Government, Public Service Commission. February 2007.
3. Elements of a Healthy Workplace™. National Quality Institute.
4. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Health Canada. 2007.
5. *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide—First Nations, Inuit and Métis*. Health Canada 2007.
6. Workplace Health System: An Overview. Creating A Healthy Workplace. Health Canada. 1990.
7. Employment by age, sex, type of work, class of work—Nova Scotia. Statistics Canada. February 2006. <<http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/labr66d.htm>> (February 11, 2007).
8. *Guide to Nutrition Promotion in the Workplace*. Nutrition Resource Centre, Ontario Public Health Association. June 2002.
9. *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia*. Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection, March 2005.
10. *Canadian Guidelines for Body Weight Classification in Adults*. Health Canada. 2003.
11. *Tracking Nutrition Trends V*. National Institute of Nutrition and Canadian Food Information Council. May 2004.
12. “Food Habits of Canadians Study: Comparison of Intakes in Adolescents to Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating.” Jacobs-Starkey, L., L. Johnson-Down, and K. Gray-Donald. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Research & Practice* 62, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 61–9.
13. *Workplace Health System: An Overview Creating a Healthy Workplace*. Health Canada 1990.
14. *Healthy Eating Strategy for Capital Health*. Conrad, B., and J. P. Pryor. November 2006. (Healthy Choice is a partnership of Healthy Workplace and Food and Nutrition Services of Capital Health.)