

Healthy Food and Beverage Tip Sheet

An effective way to improve the food choices made by children and adults is to increase the number of healthy foods and healthy beverages available. Sometimes, however, the task of defining healthy can nearly break a committee apart. A good way to help the committee define healthy foods and healthy beverages is to review what another organization has used and keep or edit their definition. Listed below are some links to websites that have healthy food and beverage definitions.

California 5 a Day – Be Active! Worksite Program

This program is a statewide public health initiative that empowers low- and middle-income working adults to consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables and enjoy physical activity every day. “Healthy” food options include fruits and vegetables, and items that have no added sugar and that are low-fat and/or reduced-sodium. Examples include fruit and/or vegetable salads, whole fruits, cut-up vegetables, fat-free yogurt, lean meat sandwiches, broiled or baked meats or fish, light or fat-free salad dressings, and whole grain breads. “Healthy” beverage options include low-fat or fat-free milk, 100% fruit juice, or water. The program has a Fit Business Kit that includes materials on healthy meeting policies, vending machine nutrition standards, and healthy dining menu guidelines. For more information see www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/worksite/

FDA Healthy Food Claim

In its role to regulate the food label on most foods, the Food and Drug Administration has defined “healthy.” A “healthy” food must be low in fat (3 g or less per serving) and saturated fat (1 g or less per serving) and contain limited amounts of cholesterol (not more than 60 mg) and sodium. In addition, if it's a single-item food, it must provide at least 10 percent of one or more of vitamins A or C, iron, calcium, protein, or fiber. Exempt from this “10-percent” rule are certain raw, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables and certain cereal-grain products. These foods can be labeled “healthy,” if they do not contain ingredients that change the nutritional profile, and, in the case of enriched grain products, conform to standards of identity, which call for certain required ingredients. If it's a meal-type product, such as frozen entrees and multi-course frozen dinners, it must provide 10 percent of two or three of these vitamins or minerals or of protein or fiber, in addition to meeting the other criteria. The sodium content cannot exceed 360 mg per serving for individual foods and 480 mg per serving for meal-type products. For more information on the healthy food claim go to this FDA webpage:

<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/backgrounders/foodlabel/newlabel.html>

Local School Wellness Policies

One section of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 requires that all school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program have local wellness policies. Among other things the wellness policies should include nutrition guidelines for all foods available on each school campus. Many organizations including the School Nutrition Association, Action for Healthy Kids and the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service have sample policies listed on their websites. The School Nutrition Association's webpage with sample policies is www.schoolnutrition.org/Index.aspx?id=1076. The Action for Healthy Kids webpage with resources to help develop wellness policies is www.actionforhealthykids.org/resources_wp.php. And, the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service webpage with information on school wellness policies is www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy.html.

In addition to those listed above, several state education and/or health agencies have sample policies and other resources available on their websites. For example, the Alabama Department of Public Health has a "Guide to Healthy Vending Machines" posted on their website. The guide includes a list of recommended beverages and snacks. For this guide see www.adph.org/NUTRITION/default.asp?DeptId=115&TemplateId=2265&TemplateNbr=0.

Nutrition Standards for Food in Schools from the Institute of Medicine, Food and Nutrition Board

Due in October 2006 is a report from the Institute of Medicine, Food and Nutrition Board, that should include nutritional standards for foods and beverages offered in schools. See www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/30181.aspx for more information.

Winner's Circle Healthy Dining Program

The Winner's Circle is one of the several public health programs developed by NC Prevention Partners, a non-profit organization based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The Winner's Circle Healthy Dining Program identifies and promotes healthy menu items available in dining establishments. The Winner's Circle Healthy Dining program's nutrition criteria helps promote foods that are linked to better health - fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, and calcium-rich foods. Winner's Circle also limits total fat and sodium. See www.winnerscirclehealthydining.com/criteria.htm for more information.