



A Fresh Start:

A Guide to Offering Healthy
Food and Drink Options in
Recreation Food Services



Introduction

Recreation facilities strive to enhance individual and community well-being and quality of life. To help achieve this goal, facilities have an opportunity to create spaces that support physical activity as well as healthy eating. This booklet provides key steps, tools and resources to help you create and enhance healthy changes to recreation food services.

Together we can help make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Created by Alberta Recreation and Parks Associations' Communities ChooseWell program in partnership with Alberta Health Services.



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Healthy food environments: What are they and why are they important?

What is a healthy food environment?

Food environments are factors that influence people's choices about what, when, where, why and how much people eat and drink. *For example:*

- The food and drinks that are available
- How much food and drinks cost
- Advertisements and messaging about what to eat and drink
- Social and cultural norms
- And more

Creating healthy food environments means making it easier and more enticing for people to identify, choose and enjoy healthy food and drink options.

Why is it important?

Places where people work, live and play have a large role in determining overall health and well-being. Because facilities act as community hubs and gathering spaces for all ages and demographics, the environment within the facility can have a large impact on community health and wellness behaviours.



This is especially true for children and youth because they frequently use recreation facilities.

Impact on children and youth

Research shows that children and youth are disproportionately affected by food environments around them. Children and youth are still developing eating behaviours and their decisions are more susceptible to external influences, such as advertising and the available food options^{1,2}.

For those reasons, the presence of unhealthy options, combined with seeing adults consume them, makes unhealthy options more desirable to children and youth.

By offering and encouraging healthy options, recreation facilities can contribute to building life-long healthy eating habits.

¹Benchmarking Food Environments Project. (2020). Alberta's 2020 nutrition report card on food environments for children & youth. <https://abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca/evidence/albertas-nutrition-report-card/>

²Government of Alberta. (2012). Alberta nutrition guidelines for children and youth. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/1c291796-4eb0-4073-be8e-bce2d331f9ce/resource/3319786c-1df1-43ca-8693-067f733682dc/download/nutrition-guidelines-ab-children-youth.pdf>

Steps to success

Ready to start taking action to make positive changes to food environments in your recreation facility?

Get started with these steps!

Step 1: Customer surveys

Step 2: Menu makeover

Step 3: Marketing healthy options



Step 1: Customer surveys

Customer or patron surveys are valuable tools to connect with your customers. They help you learn what healthy foods and drinks customers will buy, what their purchasing habits are, and also help to assess the importance customers place on the availability of healthy options.

Different types of patron surveys

There are many different and creative ways to deliver surveys. When deciding on what type you will use, consider what will get you the best response from your customers.

- Written or online surveys and forms: Present your customers with a series of questions either on paper or online
- Jar voting polls: Provide rocks, beads, or popsicle sticks for customers to add as a vote to the jar or option of their choice
- Customer conversations: Ask for feedback during conversations with customers during ordering



Stettler Recreation Centre - Concession Survey 2016

The Stettler Wellness Network and Stettler Recreation Centre, in partnership with the Eat, Play, Live Study are looking to offer more healthy food options in vending machines and the concession stand. Our goal is to make healthy food choices the easy, affordable choice for all people that use Stettler Recreation Centre.

As users of the facilities, we want your input! We are trying to get a better idea of what types of foods you would like to see at the concession for purchase. Healthy foods fuel young athletes and the families that come to support them. Let's help make the healthy choice, the easy choice.

1. How important is healthy eating to you and/or your family on a scale of 1 *Not Important* to 5 *Very Important*?

- 1 - Not important
- 2 - Limited importance
- 3 - Somewhat
- 4 - Important
- 5 - Very important

2. What percentage of foods and beverages do you think should be healthy at the concession?

- 100%
- 75%
- 50%
- 25%

3. Do you buy food from the concession?

- Yes
- No

Patron survey example



Quick tip: Incentivize

Add an incentive prize or gift to encourage participation in the patron survey.

For more details and tips on creating patron surveys, check out [Module 4: A Business Case of the free online Healthy Eating in Recreation Settings eCourse:](#)

Communitieschoosewell.ca

Step 2: Menu makeover

Now that you know what your customers want, it's time to revamp your menu.

Remember: You don't have to make every change all at once.

Check out some tips for transforming your menu from the Registered Dietitians in Alberta Health Services:

How to make healthy substitutions

Vegetables and fruit

- Use fresh, frozen, dried, or canned vegetables and fruit instead of deep fried vegetables or fruit with added sugar
- Use a variety of vegetables or fruit to add colour and flavour
- Use fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit in your recipes! Choose fruit canned in water or juice
- Bake fries, wedges or hash browns instead of deep frying



Quick tip: Make healthy options the default

For example, whole grains become the automatic choice for burgers and sandwiches, salad becomes a side dish, and dressings and sauces come pre-portioned or on request.

Whole grains

- Choose foods with whole grains as the first ingredient
- Use whole grain bread or buns instead of white
- Use brown rice, whole grain pasta, barley, or quinoa instead of white grains
- Sell whole grain hot cereal and pancakes or muffins instead of using white flour

Protein foods

- Choose protein foods that are lower in fat and salt
- Use canned fish or lean cuts of poultry, beef or pork instead of processed or deli meats
- Use beans, lentils or tofu for a plant-based protein option
- Use lower-fat cheeses, Greek yogurt, or cottage cheese

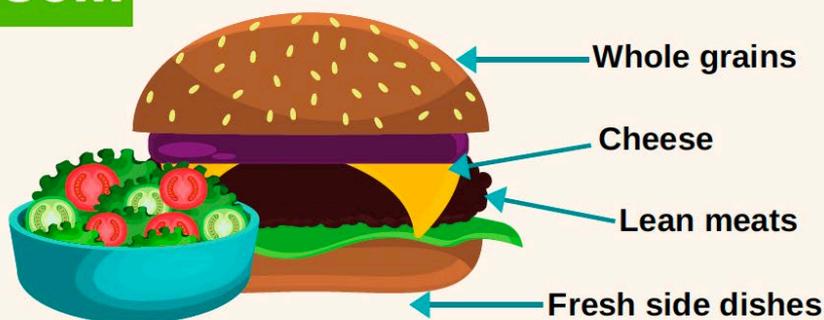


For more tips and examples check out [Module 7: Concession Stand Menu Makeover of the free online Healthy Eating in Recreation Settings eCourse](#)

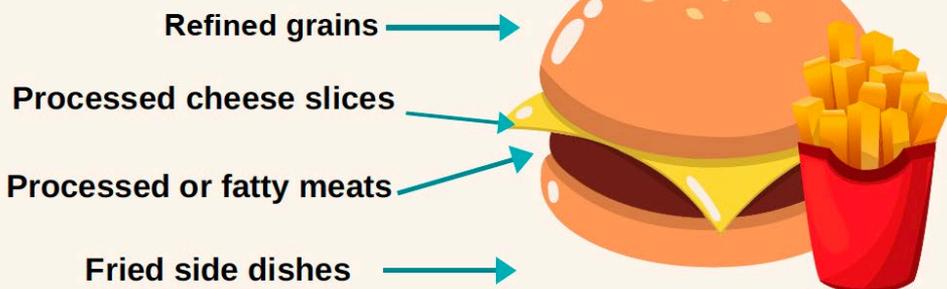
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Healthy Substitutions

Use...



Instead of...

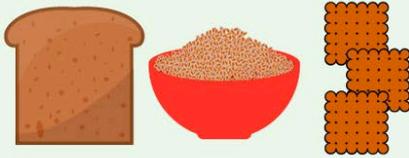


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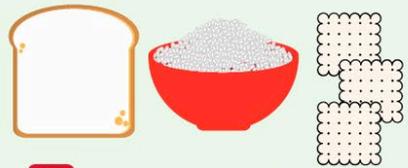
Healthy Replacements

Use...

Instead of...



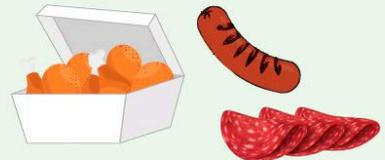
✓ Whole grains



✗ Refined grains



✓ Lean meats,
poultry and fish



✗ Processed meats



✓ Cheese and
cheese strings



✗ Processed cheese
slices and spreads

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Step 3: Marketing healthy options

Marketing healthy options is a great way to support the success of a new or revamped menu item. Consider the four P's of marketing to nudge your customers to choose the healthy options:

- Product
- Placement
- Price
- Promotion

Nudging towards healthier options

Nudging uses cues to influence customer's food choices. These cues help customers have freedom of choice while at the same time making healthier items stand out. You can do this with:

- Signage
- Price adjustments
- Taste tests

How to Market Healthy Food and Drinks: The 4 P's

Placement

Put healthy choices where customers will see them first



Price

Make the healthy choice the better price



Promotion

Make healthy options stand out



Product

Increase the number of healthy items available



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For more marketing tips, check out [Alberta Health Services Healthy Eating Starts Here: How to Market Healthy Food & Drinks webpage at:](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page17170.aspx)

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page17170.aspx>

Marketing Quick tips

Product



- Create specials and combination meals that include healthy drinks and side dishes
- Use healthy cooking methods and healthy recipes
- Only offer regular and half portions rather than super sizes
- Replace less healthy ingredients with healthy options

Increase the number of healthy items available

- Offer snack options that include vegetables, fruit, whole grains or protein foods
- Set up healthy pre-order menus or bag lunches for teams, groups and events



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Product

Revamp menu items by swapping ingredients and changing the default sides and drinks. Increase your sales and attract locals and visitors by offering healthy snack packs and pre-order team menus.

Placement



Put healthy choices where customers will see them first

- near the checkout
- at eye level
- within easy reach
- in high traffic areas



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Placement

- Place a bowl of assorted fresh fruit on the counter
- Have a variety of items in an easy-to-access display case where people can grab and go
- Attractively display healthy drinks, with water being the drink of choice

Price

Make the healthy choice the better price

- Make the price of all items easy to see
- Charge less for healthy items compared to less healthy ones
- Offer half portions at half the price
- Use healthy items for frequent buyer cards and combo meals

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Price

Offset the cost of healthier items by offering them at a lower price and making the less-healthy items more expensive.

Promotion

Make healthy options stand out

BEST SELLER
Tuscan Chicken Pesto Wrap
Tender grilled chicken, crisp vegetable mix, caramelized onions and smoky cheddar wrapped in a whole grain tortilla with tangy pesto sauce

GO FOR SOMETHING FRESH!
Fiery Southwestern Plant Bowl
Spicy black beans, crisp anguilla, plump cherry tomatoes and creamy avocado slices glazed in a fresh lime sriracha dressing

FUEL UP WITH TASTY FOODS
Try one of our smart snack packs!

TRY OUR NEW FEATURE
Royal Velvet Berry Smoothie
ASK FOR A SAMPLE!

Menu Tips

- List healthy items first on the menu and highlight with catchy titles
- Use appealing words to describe flavour, texture and cooking method
- Add positive messages about healthy eating
- Use attractive photos, images or packaging
- Offer free samples to promote new items

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Promotion

Offer incentives for people who often purchase healthy options. For example, introduce a loyalty card where if you buy four smoothies (or other healthy options) you get the fifth one free.

Boost your sales

This section goes through some opportunities to boost sales and customer base in recreation food services.

Consumer and market trends

Consumers have changed the ways and the frequency with which they access food outside the home. There may be opportunities to capitalize on new ways of serving the community. Consumers are looking for convenience and efficiency in ordering food.

Online ordering and promotions

Food service operators can create an online ordering option. Link the menu to a phone number, Google Forms or a Facebook page for ordering. This allows those in the facility as well as outside to order ahead and pick up food.

Quick tip: How to create online ordering forms

Check out add-on options to create inexpensive or free online ordering systems. For example, you can easily upgrade free Google Forms into an online ordering system.

For full details and setup watch the tutorial video: [Setup Online Food Ordering System in Google Forms | Show Order Total & Order Summary - YouTube \(https://youtu.be/BLm1U6cAQe0\)](https://youtu.be/BLm1U6cAQe0)

Pre-order team meals

To support our athletes and fuel their performance, create and advertise pre-ordered team meals for hockey tournaments and out of town visiting teams. Get creative: offer a mixture of hot meals or to-go brown bag lunches.

FLO'S

CONCESSION

TEAM MENU

<h3 style="text-align: center;">SNACK- PACKS</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Homemade Muffin & Whole Fruit</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$3.00+ GST/person</p> <div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"><p style="color: green; font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">FUEL Up to Perform!</p></div>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">PASTA</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Spaghetti & Meat Balls</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Penne & Chicken with Rose Sauce</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lasagna</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Served with: Caesar or Garden Salad Garlic Toast</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bottled Water</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$8.00+ GST/person</p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">WRAPS</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Roasted Chicken Taco Beef Tuna</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Served with: Veggies & Dip or Whole Fruit</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bottled Water</p> <p style="text-align: center;">\$8.00 +GST/person</p>
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Please provide 24 hours' notice for all team orders
Vegetarian options available upon request

Take-and-eat kits

Convenience and time pressure remain important to consumers. Consider creating family meal kits requiring simple preparation or easy and customizable heat-and-eat options.

Quick tip: Frozen and fresh options

Offer individual or family sized fresh and frozen options to take home. For example, consider frozen, ready-to-heat lasagna, chicken taco kits, or meal-sized salads.

Sustainable and innovative packaging

Use recyclable materials in place of plastic or styrofoam.

Note: some packaging is now biodegradable or compostable. Transition to take-away drink sip lids in place of straws.



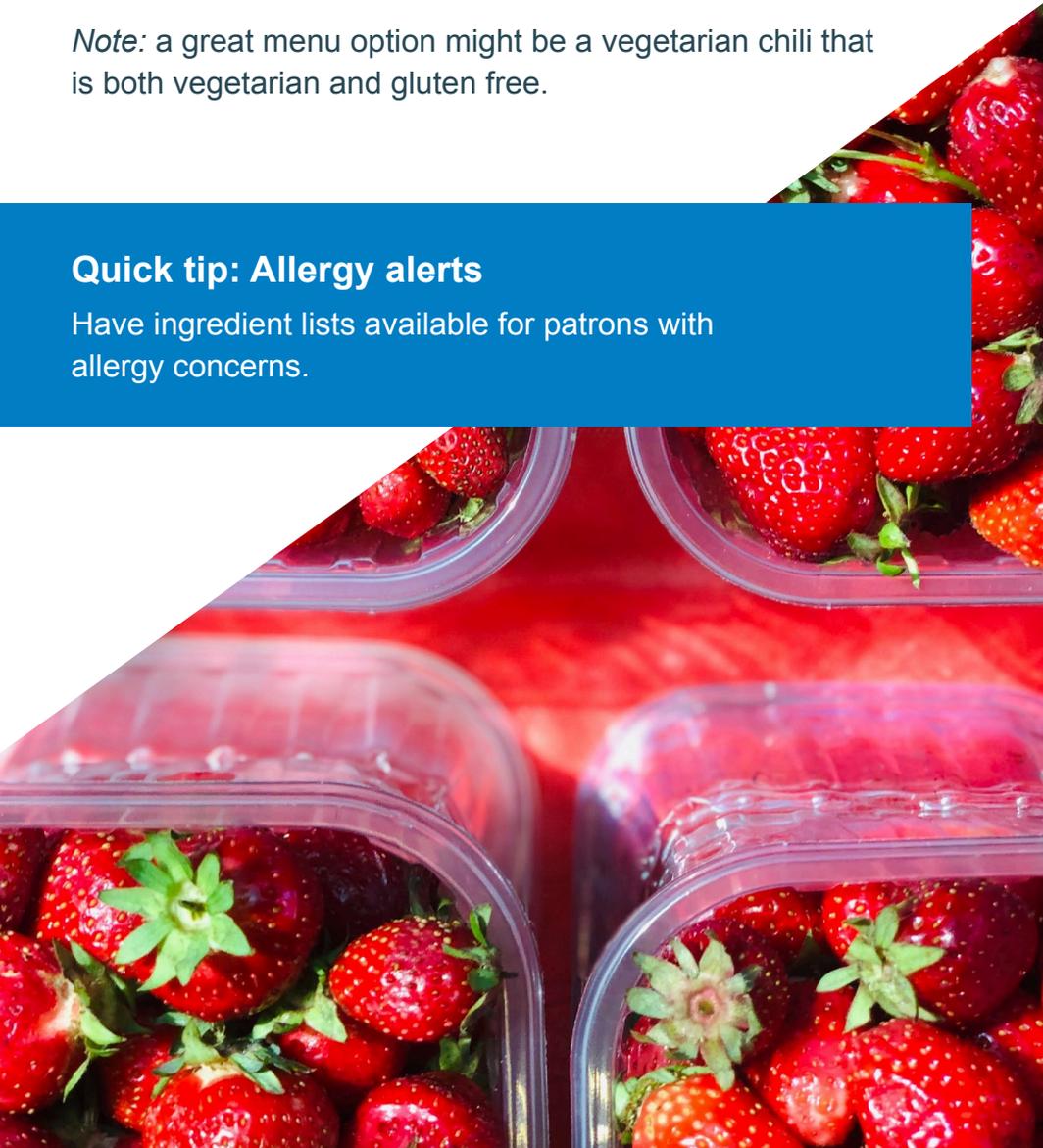
Supporting patrons dietary preferences

- Offer low-cost vegetarian or plant based options
- Advertise for customer dietary preferences including vegetarian, gluten free or dairy free
- Add or highlight plant-based protein or drink options

Note: a great menu option might be a vegetarian chili that is both vegetarian and gluten free.

Quick tip: Allergy alerts

Have ingredient lists available for patrons with allergy concerns.



How can recreation facilities support successful food services

There are opportunities for recreation facilities and staff to support food services to be healthy and successful! Look at the ideas below for how you can take action.

Healthy options at all events

Recreation facilities are hubs in the community used as a workplace but also are used as a location to host a variety of public events. It's important to offer healthy options at all facility functions. Explore the food options offered at:

The facility as a workplace

- Meetings
- Special staff events

Public events

- Birthday parties
- Youth programming
- Conferences
- Tradeshows
- Meetings

Advertising and marketing

Use your recreation facility website, social media page(s) or community ad space to promote facility food service initiatives. For example:

- Links to the menu and/or online ordering system
- Catering for meetings and events
- Patron surveys
- Promotion or highlighting of new healthy food menu options

Nudging

Work with your food service operator to bring customers to them.

- Use fun floor stickers, signs or arrows to direct customers to the concession or vending, especially if your food services is in a lower traffic area or during tournaments for visitors unfamiliar with the facility
- Place posters or sandwich signs in high traffic areas to promote and market the food service operator

Resources

Healthy Eating in Recreation Settings online eCourse

This free, online eCourse has eight modules that cover a variety of topics related to improving food environments in recreation facilities. The modules are 20 minutes in length, are self-guided and can be taken in any order. Earn certificates for completing the modules or for the full eCourse.

<https://communitieschoosewell.ca/resources/for-recreation/healthy-eating-in-recreation-settings/online-course/>



Healthy Eating in Recreation Settings (HERS) Peer Learning Network

The HERS Peer Learning Network is an online space for ChooseWell champions to network and connect to share their ideas, skills, resources and experiences. The group meets every quarter to discuss ongoing developments, ideas and to connect.

<https://communitieschoosewell.ca/learning-connecting/peer-learning-network/healthy-eating-in-recreation-settings/>



Resources

Alberta Health Services Healthy Eating Starts Here

Created by Alberta Health Services Dietitians, the *Healthy Eating Starts Here* website provides tools, templates and activities that support healthy eating in a variety of settings. Check out their resources to support recreation facilities:

Marketing and healthy substitutions infographics

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page17170.aspx>

Healthy vending toolkit

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page13884.aspx>

Get in contact with your local dietitian by emailing

publichealth.nutrition@ahs.ca



Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention: Healthy Food in Recreational Facilities Resource Hub

This resource hub provides you with research summary articles, success stories and evidence to help you gain buy-in for creating healthy change.

<https://abpolicycoalitionforprevention.ca/resources/resource-hub/>



For more information visit:

arpaonline.ca

communitieschoosewell.ca

