



## Healthy eating at work

Did you know that Canadians spend almost 2,000 hours at work each year? For many people, work is literally a “home away from home.”

Given all the time we spend at work and commuting back and forth from it, the dietary choices we make during work time can have a huge impact on our health and wellness.

The good news is that healthier choices can become habits just like anything else, even during a busy work day. This article provides tips for purchasing and preparing healthy meals to make your weeks that much healthier.

### Planning is the key

Planning what you’re going to eat during your work days can go a long ways toward improving your health. We suggest you

- stock up on healthy snack foods,
- bring brown bag meals that are nutritious, and
- make healthy eating a priority at home and at work.

### Stock up on healthy foods

At work, keep a small, regular supply of non-perishable, healthy food on hand in a convenient location—in the staff kitchen, at your desk or work station, in your locker or in a cupboard in a lunch room.

Use this food for snacks or to round out your regular meals throughout the day. It’s also a great stash to have for those days when you forget to bring a lunch.

For example, try stocking up on

- dried fruits (such as raisins, cranberries, apples or apricots);
- whole-grain crackers, mini-boxes of whole-grain cereal or trail mix;
- single-serving cans of tuna, salmon or baked beans;
- hot or cold cereals (look for cereals that provide at least four grams of fibre per serving);
- peanut butter or pea butter; and
- single-serving canned fruit or applesauce (look for fruits that are packed in water or fruit juice and contain no added sugar).

Replenish your supply at least once a month to ensure that you always have a fresh supply of healthy foods on hand.

And don’t forget to drink lots of water. Before work, pack a water bottle that you can refill as needed throughout the day. Lack of water can make it harder to concentrate and can affect your work performance. Avoid specialty coffees and teas and soft drinks. Instead, enjoy water with your workplace snacks and meals.

### Brown bag meals should be healthy meals

Make the most of your lunch breaks. Don’t spend them waiting in line at a restaurant; enjoy them from home, if you can, or find a comfortable space where you can enjoy your homemade lunch. Not only will you save time and money, but research shows that meals prepared at home tend to be lower in fat, sugar, salt and calories.

A healthy brown bag meal should include choices from all four food groups from Canada’s Food Guide.

For example, you could bring a whole-wheat pita (grain product group) stuffed with shaved turkey (meat and alternative group), plus raw vegetables (vegetable and fruit group) and a container of low-fat yogurt (dairy product group).

Here are some tips on how to make tasty, nutritional lunches with minimal fuss:

- Planning is the secret to making homemade lunches quick and easy. Dedicate a few minutes each weekend to planning what your lunches for the coming week will include.
- Do it yourself. Avoid buying commercially made, pre-packed lunches and snacks. While convenient, these items are expensive and can contain large amounts of fat, calories, salt and sugar.
- Know where you’re going. Find out what’s available in your workplace in terms of refrigerator space for lunches, microwave access, stove and kettle use and storage space for your non-perishable food items. Knowing what’s available for storing and reheating your lunch will help you plan what to bring.
- Make the most of leftovers from home meals; keep lunch preparation as simple as possible by bringing them to work. To avoid repetition, consider freezing various types of leftovers in portable containers. Choose the food that fits your mood and reheat it at lunch time.
- Plan to keep your lunch foods safe and tasty by packing them in a reusable, insulated lunch bag. Use frozen

containers of juice, water or milk to help keep foods cold in case you don't have access to a fridge. Use insulated containers to keep foods like soup or stew piping hot. Purchase a supply of inexpensive, reusable containers to carry cut-up fruit, sandwiches and salads.

## Think outside the lunch box

Try and overcome the boredom that's sometimes associated with homemade lunches by varying your choices each day. Keep in mind that lunch does not have to be limited to sandwiches.

Here are some ideas for varying your food choices and keeping lunch tasty and enjoyable:

- Spice it up. Top a leftover baked potato with salsa, kidney beans and grated cheese for lunch with a Mexican flare.
- Dice leftover cooked chicken and mix with curry powder, celery, raisins and plain yogurt. Serve in a whole grain pita.
- Have breakfast for lunch. Pack your favourite cereal and a container of milk. Round out this lunch with a piece of fruit and a hard-boiled egg.
- Go green. Salads are wonderful homemade lunch items. Save time by washing your salad ingredients in advance and preparing enough salad greens to last you several days. Pack vegetables such as cucumbers or sliced tomatoes in portable containers, and add them to your salad just before eating. Use leftover meats, canned fish, hard-boiled eggs, grated cheese or beans to top it off.

- Brainstorm alternatives. Tired of bread? Why not serve your sandwich as a wrap or a pita? Enjoy tuna or salmon salad on whole-grain crackers. Add leftover chunks of ham to canned, baked beans for a hearty alternative to a ham sandwich.

## Food safety

Finally, food safety is important. Keep foods at safe temperatures; put food that's meant to be hot in containers that lock the heat in and use ice packs to keep cold food icy cold.

If possible, avoid eating at your desk—desktops have been shown to harbour high levels of bacteria, which can pose a health risk. Why not enjoy your lunch in the staff lunchroom or, weather permitting, head outside and have a picnic.

Healthy eating contributed greatly to your overall well-being. And if you can combine it with regular physical activity, it can go that much further.

## Learn more

### [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide](#)

Canada's Food Guide is a quick, easy map of what you should eat and how much.

*Content provided courtesy of Alberta Health's Healthy U initiative.*