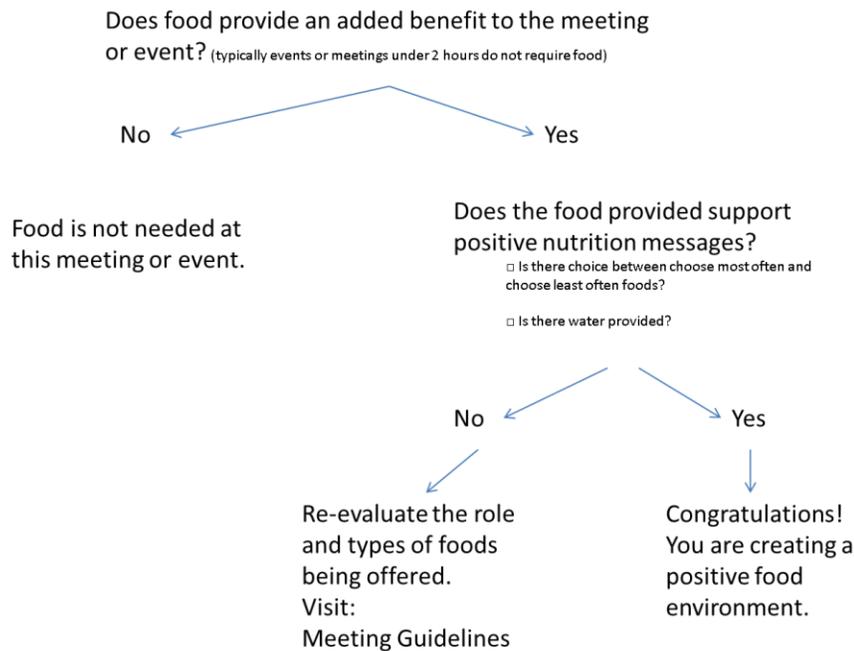


## The Case for Healthy Foods

Food is more than fuel for our bodies. It provides a social, cultural and traditional role in our society. With healthy meeting and event guidelines we want to honor the role that food has in our culture by creating positive food experiences for both staff and clients. However, it needs to be recognized that our physical and social environments have a huge impact on our health and safety. The environment in which we work, study, and live each day shapes many of the choices we make, and either can support or hinder efforts to eat well.

**Use this flow chart to determine if food is needed:**



Healthy Meeting & Event Guidelines found here:

[www.rqhealth.ca/primary-health-care/nutrition-services](http://www.rqhealth.ca/primary-health-care/nutrition-services)

When working in partnership, there may not be an opportunity to influence the foods offered. It is challenging to think of the event as a whole. Food is often used to recruit participants and the thought about the message it may send to participants is not considered. Gauge the readiness to change of your audience. If there seems to be support, offer ideas from Choosing Food & Beverages for Healthy Meetings & Events.

**If the group does not seem ready to make changes to the food choices being provided:**

- Provide information on the benefits of providing healthy foods (improves productivity, energy levels, concentration, learning, support for those with chronic conditions etc.)

- Encourage water be available
- Encourage choice
- Suggest “pilot” or “experiment”
- Ask participants how they felt abo the food or include it on the evaluation.

*Small changes can make a big impact*

Efforts to introduce healthier foods are sometimes met with resistance. Below are some common arguments that are presented, along with discussion points supporting change.

**“These foods are being offered as a treat.”**

- Healthy foods have become the exception rather than the norm in many situations.
- Foods with low nutrient value have become a large part of many diets, accounting for about one third of average calorie intakes. At these levels, the nutritious foods that children need for health, growth and optimal school performance are being squeezed out.
- Children learn to prefer foods associated with fun social occasions. Health region events offer a valuable opportunity to model the enjoyment of healthy foods.
- When unhealthy foods at special occasions can help to promote a mindset where healthy foods are viewed as treats. Fresh berries, watermelon and corn on the cob are examples of foods that are very popular when served at special events.
- Foods should never be offered as a reward or incentive. That does not create a positive relationship with food.

**“It is up to individuals to make healthy choices”**

- It is unrealistic to expect most children to regularly make healthier choices when they are routinely faced with a myriad of unhealthy choices.
- Heavy marketing and advertising of unhealthy foods in our society creates an uneven playing field.
- In some situations, very few if any healthy choices are offered.
- It can be very beneficial to offer choices. However, it is always important to ensure that they are given the opportunity to make choices from among healthy options.

**“Individuals will not buy or eat nutritious foods.”**

- Places that provide healthy choices have found that people do buy and eat nutritious foods when they are offered. This is especially true when the healthier choices are not competing with unhealthy choices that have come to be seen as more desirable in our society. For example, children will happily eat a vegetable or fruit platter at a classroom party, but the healthy choices may go untouched if doughnuts are also offered.

**“These foods won’t harm them.”**

- A majority of Canadians do not eat nutritionally balanced or adequate diets.
- Canadians nutritional health is declining. There are high nutrition-related conditions such as obesity and diabetes.
- Current trends in the prevalence of diet-related health conditions are placing a rapidly growing strain on our health care system as well as the health of individuals.
- Poor nutrition decreases the learning potential, productivity and energy levels.

**“Healthy foods cost more”**

- Some healthy foods may be more expensive. This can be offset by making portion sizes more reasonable, ordering less food, and rethinking whether snacks are needed at each break and meeting.
- It does not cost more to ask for whole grain breads, pastas, thin pizza crusts and less cheese, dressings on the side etc.
- Water is free from all drinking faucets.

**“Let’s keep it simple.” Or we’ll do what we always do”**

- Healthy eating does not need to be complicated. You may need to reconsider where food is ordered from.

Adapted from: “The Case for Healthy Foods,” Public Health Nutritionist of Saskatchewan Working Group.