



Source: Northern Healthy Communities Partnership

Nutrition Update Newsletter

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A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

Building Food Environments for Healthy Communities

The type and quality of foods available where people live, learn, work and play make up their food environment (1).

How easy or difficult it is to make a healthy choice can depend on many factors including the food environment. Food environments can affect food purchasing, eating habits and diet-related health outcomes (1).

The food and drink choices available to Canadians in restaurants, recreation centres, schools and workplaces can often make it difficult to choose a healthy option. Making nutritious options more available than unhealthy food options can have a positive impact on eating habits and diet quality (2).

To improve your food environment, collaborate with others inside and outside your organization, so healthy choices are more available.

1. Get involved with events and programming in your community:

- Increase the visibility of healthy food choices when and where they are provided.
- Consider only offering water.
- Volunteer with associations that run events and share your ideas on how to include healthy choices.

- Create a demand by requesting or purchasing nutritious foods at public events, such as sports tournaments.
- Implement policy and programs in your organization such as collective kitchens and school or community gardens.
- Support healthy initiatives that are already in place to ensure their success.

2. Support food production and distribution networks:

- Support community harvesting programs, gardens, and farmer's markets.
- Donate healthy food items to food banks and community pantries.
- Volunteer with organizations that distribute food and teach food skills.
- Explore places you can grow, harvest or preserve your own food locally.

3. Offer input for local infrastructure planning:

- Participate in local municipal planning processes and advocate for a healthy community.

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- Assist local authorities as they shift towards healthy food environments.
- Support the inclusion of health promoting language in master plans, proposals and contracts.
- Support healthy menu and vending items, and removal of deep fryers.
- Ask for the addition of water fountains or bottle filling stations.



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We all have a role in creating healthy communities. Each of us has a responsibility to help create and support healthy food environments for our families, friends, coworkers, clients and fellow community members.

Ask a Nutrition Expert

Why do we need to be aware of unhealthy food marketing?

Food marketing plays a large role in a healthy food environment. While food marketing affects us all, children and youth are particularly vulnerable. Children and youth's brains are not fully developed and are not able to be critical of marketing or distinguish between marketing and entertainment (3).

Food marketing can be seen on screens, fronts of vending machines, rinks or playing field surfaces and score clocks. Food companies also disguise marketing as community support initiatives such as sponsorship of teams, children's activities, school rewards and recognition. These food and drink promotions directly affect our food preferences, choices and eating habits.

Children and youth are learning and playing in environments saturated with food messages that blur their understanding of healthy and unhealthy foods. Often the result is that unhealthy foods become normalized, which changes eating habits. The increased consumption of these foods results in long-term health effects.

We all have a role to play. Become aware of food marketing and work to reduce the promotion of unhealthy foods. Try to ensure consistent healthy messages about food. By decreasing unhealthy food marketing, we can help develop positive eating behaviours and improve short and long-term health consequences.

I would like to offer healthy choices, but I'm worried they won't be popular. How do I encourage people to pick the healthier choice?

Use the 4 P's of marketing to make sure your healthy choices are more popular than unhealthy choices. Product, place, price and promotion all impact how a person chooses what to consume. Consider the following:

Product: Healthy items are more likely to be popular if they are in demand, high quality and convenient. Try a customer survey to find out about people's preferences. Maintain the quality of your healthy choices and make sure they look appetizing and fresh.

Place: There are certain places where customers are more likely to notice foods and therefore choose them, such as by the till or at eye level. Ensure the healthy items are very visible and easy to pick-out.

Price: Cost is a factor that affects food choices for many people. Price healthy items, such as a veggie cup, the same or less than a comparable unhealthy choice, such as a bag of potato chips.

Promotion: Promotion lets customers know what delicious healthy items you have available. Get people excited about your healthy items with eye catching posters or social media posts. Use messaging about good taste, fun and increased energy.

Healthy choices need to be made as available and as appealing as unhealthy choices for people to have equal choice.



Picture taken in a community setting in Saskatoon, SK

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Resources



Healthy Foods for my Recreation Setting
Nutrition Standards for Saskatchewan

Recreation settings play an important role in helping communities be physically active and healthy. This tool can be used to:

- evaluate recreation settings and identify areas for improvement
- determine what healthy food and beverage options are available
- set goals to improve healthy food and beverage choices

Other helpful resources:

1. **[Healthy Foods for my Recreation Setting – Nutrition Standards for Saskatchewan and Getting Started](#)** are tools that recreation and community settings can use to choose healthy food and beverage options to offer staff, customers and participants through concessions, vending, fundraisers, programs and events.
2. **[Healthy Foods for my School - Nutrition Standards for Saskatchewan, Food Safety for my School and Planning Healthy Menus for my School](#)** are tools that schools can use to choose healthy food and beverage options to provide to students, to understand what safe food handling practices are, and to menu plan for food programs.
3. **[Food Environments: An Introduction for Public Health Practice](#)** highlights key evidence for the relationship between food environments and health, and identifies some ways environmental public health practitioners can influence food environments.

References:

1. Rideout, K., Mah, C.L. and Minaker, L. 2015. Food environments: An introduction for public health practice. Vancouver, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Available at http://www.nccch.ca/sites/default/files/Food_Environments_Public_Health_Practice_Dec_2015.pdf
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3. www.Stopmarketingtokids.ca Retrieved 27 November 2019.