



# A guide to planning healthy meetings



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR South-East Asia



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# 1. Organizing healthy meetings



Healthy meetings model healthy lifestyles through the work environment. Meetings planned with healthy living in mind confers many benefits to participants, and has the potential to create better overall health, motivate those uninitiated and catalyze further health promotional actions. Creating a culture of health and wellness in meetings goes a long way towards instilling good practices at workplaces. Healthy meetings should also include actions to promote and prioritize sustainable practices such as minimizing plastic and food waste.



## 2. Planning ahead



Communicate the concept of healthy meetings to the participants right from the start. Messages must be positive and participants should not be made to feel that healthy practices are an added burden.

### Do's and don't's

- Economize on time, fuel, food and other consumables from a sustainability point of view.
- Select a venue that is easily accessible by public transport or on foot, with opportunities for physical activity and facilities for accommodating differently abled participants.
- Sensitize participants on the value of paperless meetings. E-communication prior to the meeting, online registration and dissemination of meeting materials will reduce paper waste.
- Select foods and ingredients that are local and organic whenever possible and accommodate special dietary needs.
- Provide breast-feeding support if requested.
- Serve meals using the buffet or self-service instead of boxed meals or separately wrapped items; this creates an opportunity for participants to serve less and thus eat less and, will also reduce packaging waste.
- Avoid serving water in plastic bottles and cans. Serve water in jars with reusable or recyclable cups. Encourage participants to bring their own reusable cup, mug or water container.
- Avoid use of plastic, including name tags. Replace with paper name tags. Use recyclable or compostable products at every opportunity.



### 3. Snacks, meals and beverages



When planning healthy meals, taste is a key consideration. Reducing salt, sugar and fat need not result in lack of taste - other ingredients such as herbs and spices enhances taste and flavors. Being imaginative is key.

- Often, meetings provide excess food and too many options, which encourage participants to over eat. Offer fewer options, lesser amounts of foods per serving and smaller portion sizes while ensuring that foods are fresh, tasty and healthy.
- Label foods with nutrition facts such as calorie count per serve to provide participants the choice for informed decisions.
- Use smaller plates to reduce serving sizes. People are more likely to serve what they see first, so reserve the healthiest food items for the initial section of a buffet.
- While being sensitive to cultural and local food practices, promote locally grown food for freshness and to reduce the carbon foot print. Unprocessed, raw or cut fruits and vegetables or foods which are minimally processed are preferred over highly processed tinned or packaged products.
- Promote cooking methods including boiling, pressure cooking, grilling, broiling and baking at lower temperatures over deep frying .
- Starch should be from a variety of whole grain products (cereal, whole grain breads, brown rice and whole wheat pasta), and from fruits and vegetables.





- Protein sources should favour fish, dairy, lean meats and eggs and vegetables, which minimizes saturated fat intake by participants.
- Avoid serving sugar sweetened beverages. Offer tea and coffee with sugar or milk on the side.
- Ensure food safety through ensuring adherence to the WHO guidance on food safety – Five keys to safer food. [http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/consumer/en/5keys\\_en.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/publications/consumer/en/5keys_en.pdf?ua=1))





## 4. Healthy food choices



### 4.1 Mini snacks and finger foods

- Snacks should be improvised using local recipes and foods. Adding vegetables, fruit, fish or chicken to rice, noodle or flour-based foods and served in small portions can create imaginative and healthy snack options.
- Local pickles and chutneys can be used with reduced salt to increase taste and variety of the meals. The liberal use of herbs and spices also helps improve taste in a low-fat, low salt context.

**A great variety of regional breads exist, which can be the base for snacks with healthy toppings or fillings.**

- Mini versions of whole wheat breads, chapati, naan, roti, and paratha breads can be utilized as wraps or pitta pockets and filled with boiled or lightly sautéed vegetables, low fat cheeses, and low salt pickles and nuts.
- Mini breads such as pizza, chapati, paratha, roti, roshi, naan or crackers can be served with vegetable, chicken, or fish toppings.
- Soft fermented breads such as uttapam, palappam and hoppers can be used as a base for toppings using vegetables, fresh onions, tomato, cucumber and green chillie.







- Pancakes or soft fermented breads such as dosai can be utilized for wraps with a healthy filling.
- Sandwiches should be made with multigrain or brown bread whenever possible, and have a greater proportion of vegetables to bread.

### Fillings and toppings

- Fillings – modify traditional recipes to replace starchy roots with other vegetables. Use healthy salad options such as batar da'an (pumpkin, corn, mungbean mix), bodi Koa char (boiled bean salad).
- Suggested toppings: Gado Gado (lotek), mango and coriander salad, pineapple and celery salad, tofu pan fried with vegetables and peanut sauce, bean sprouts and vegetable mix, Som tam (papaya salad), green mango salad, mas huni or kulhiboakibaa (tuna cake, coconut spice mix), laphet thohk (green tea salad).
- Include herbs/nuts where ever possible in the preparation of fillings and marinades.
- Use mustard paste or avocado spread on breads instead of butter or mayonnaise.
- Herbs, spices, tomato-based sambal, ezays, kimchi (with less salt), budu (fermented seafood), ikan bilis, ikan sabuko and pickles with reduced oil and salt can be added to fillings and toppings in small amounts to enhance taste.



### Rice or rice flour items

- Rice flour or wheat flour dumplings such as momo which are filled with vegetables, fish or chicken and other lean meats are healthy.
- Sticky rice based small items as regionally appropriate may be filled with vegetable/fish/chicken. Budu Tasi (seaweed salad) can be served as an accompaniment. Minimize the use of soy sauce on the side.
- Rice or rice noodles with mixed vegetables in small snack sized servings can be offered as an alternative snack.

### Vegetable dishes as snacks

- Many varieties of chaat eg. chaat prepared with peanuts or chickpea or mung or lentil or brocholi with onion, tomato, chaat masala, lemon and coriander can be served in small portions.
- Most hollow vegetables (chillies, capcicum, brinjal, tomato) could be stuffed with a mixture of seasoned, vegetable/nut/ dried fruit fillings and served raw or grilled.
- Barbecued vegetables and yams including sweet potatoes served with pureed fruit and nut marinades or sauces.
- Most pulses can be ground to produce gram flour of different flavours. These can be mixed or used separately and made into small balls with vegetables and baked.







- Potato or yam balls mixed with herbs and gram flour as well as other snacks such as samosa can be baked rather than deep fried.
- Salads with low fat dressings and herbs can also be served in small portions.
- Lightly salted or unsalted nuts.

#### Dairy products

- Provide low fat yoghurt or curd with fruit and nuts.







## 4.2 Breakfast ideas

Serve varieties of fruit and vegetables without added sugar, whole grain foods and low fat dairy products. If serving fish or meats, they should be cooked using less oil, and the use of either low salt sauces or less salt should be encouraged.

### Sample menus

- Salads with low fat and low salt dressing. Local yoghurts, curd (low fat or with the fat layer removed) and cottage cheese in place of dressings.
- Fruit pulp, fruit conserve (low sugar) instead of jams. Peanut butter and low fat local cheeses are other options.
- Muesli/bran-based cereals with fruit and low-fat yoghurt.
- Whole grain breads, rice, noodles, pasta with vegetable, chicken or fish-based side dishes.
- Fried rice, noodles or pasta, with extra vegetables.
- Steamed rice and curries cooked with reduced fat/cream/coconut milk.
- Fermented breads such as dosai, uttapam, hoppers, idli are healthy. Flatbreads such as chapati, paratha and naan can be prepared with whole wheat flour.

- Masala idli stuffed with vegetables. Uttapam with added oats and vegetables are options. Thalipeeth (multigrain bread), lauki thepla (breads) can be baked with extra vegetables.
- Paratha and dosa filled with vegetable other than potatoes and served with non-fat raita
- Rice flour or wheat flour dumplings (momo) with vegetable, fish or lean meat fillings.
- Natural fruit juices, such as king coconut water or vegetable juice without added sugar and unsweetened tea/coffee.





### 4.3 Healthy lunch/dinner options

- Soups with reduced fat and no cream (milk or corn-flour thickening is possible) or clear soups with dumplings such as momos.
- Vegetable slices.
- Salads with low fat and low salt dressing. Local yoghurts, curd and cottage cheese can replace commercial dressings.
- Whole grain brown rice, wholemeal noodles and pasta.
- Brown or whole grain rice with accompanying curries e.g. chickpea, lentil or mixed vegetable curry cooked with minimum amounts of fat/cream/ghee/coconut milk.
- Whole meal or multigrain regional breads, roti or wraps can be offered.
- Fish is a better choice than meats. Use local varieties and local cooking methods that use less oil. Grilled, steamed, baked, boiled or broiled are preferred cooking methods for fish.
- Substitute lean poultry over red meats or processed meats.
- Modified chutneys and pickles which are low in sugar, salt and fat can be used for enhancing taste.
- Serve local fresh fruits without added sugar.
- Dessert options: thick fruit toppings on thin pastry or cake bases, or low fat yoghurt and fruit yoghurt are healthy.





## 5. Beverages



### Water

Hydration is a part of good health. Make water available freely throughout the meeting and during breaks. Serve water in jars with reusable or recyclable cups instead of bottled water. Encourage participants to bring their own reusable cup, mug or water container.

### Other beverages

Freshly squeezed fruit juice is a good option, though these drinks add to overall added sugar content of the diet.

Serve low or no calorie beverages including tea and coffee, with no added sugar and low fat or fat free milk.

## 6. Active breaks

Take every opportunity to instill an active lifestyle through physical activity breaks to increase participant energy, enthusiasm, and well being. Encourage being active throughout the meeting, from arrival at the venue and during the meeting.

### Physical activity at meetings should be

- completely voluntary
- safe for all
- fun, comfortable and easy
- allow participants engage in their own pace
- sensitive to limited abilities of certain individuals

### Activity breaks during the meeting

Activity breaks of 10 – 15 min duration can be incorporated to the meeting agenda.

#### Creative strategies:

- Standing/walking discussions during group activities
- Organized physical activity sessions including stretching, breathing exercise and dancing
- Mini yoga sessions.
- If differently abled participants are expected, organize alternative options for inclusivity.
- Organize breaks as opportunities for physical activity with standing only spaces etc.
- Encourage attendees to stand, stretch or move around within the meeting room as needed, and the flexibility to do so can be informed at the start of the meeting.







- Provide tall tables for those who choose to stand up and work during the meeting.
- Consider an activity based on step count using the smart phone pedometer and set an informal target for participants to reach.
- Organize a stair climb

Short activity breaks serves to create awareness for the need to reduce sedentary behavior and increase physical activity for improved health and wellness.

- Create physical activity opportunities for the participants both before the meeting and after, including yoga sessions, low impact fitness sessions and swimming.





## 7. Tobacco free environment

- Meetings should be held in tobacco free facilities.
- Make all areas linked to the meeting including meeting and accommodation areas tobacco free.



## 8. Healthy and sustainable meeting checklist

Can the meeting or part of it be organized in a moving format?	
Checked on participants accessibility needs?	
Reusable washable serving containers and utensils	
All utensils used are made out of recyclable or compostable material	
Minimize use of paper and printing	
If paper is used, is it recyclable and printed double sided in adequate numbers for sharing?	
Does the menu include variety and healthy food choices?	
Are all food groups are included in the menu?	
Do fruits and vegetables make up a good proportion of the menu?	
Are fruits and vegetables offered with every meal and snack break?	
Are whole grain products served with all main meals ?	
Have you ensured advised on low usage of saturated fat, salt and sugar in all foods that are on offer?	
Are all selected foods and beverages culturally appropriate?	
Have you ensured that sauces, dressings, condiments are served on the side?	
Did you ensure that water is freely available?	
Did you ensure that fruits and vegetables are placed at the start of the buffet line?	
Did you make sure that the items that are offered for dessert are healthy?	
Have you requested the caterers to place nutritional information including calorie count and serving size next to the food dishes served?	
Are the use of plastic and other bio-nondegradable items are avoided?	
Are enough breaks incorporated into the agenda with opportunities for physical activity?	
Are physical activity of differently abled persons looked into?	
Have you ensured a tobacco free environment in all areas linked to the meeting?	





