

fresh approaches

Ideas for enjoyable and healthy foods at social events and other gatherings

Be kind to food planners: Their task is a tough one!

“One idea worked well when we were serving box lunches to a group who met repeatedly over several months. We ordered sandwiches, but we skipped the boring chips and provided them with two small salads and a half-sized fancy dessert in a small cup. They raved!”

- UW College of Ag Food Planner

FOCUS ON
HEALTH,
NOT
WEIGHT

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Challenges to being a food planner

- Groups are often unpredictable in terms of what they like and want.
- Audiences' needs in terms of such things as allergies and religious preferences can widely vary. When appropriate, use a reply or registration form to ask about special dietary issues or requests.
- Cost. Fresh fruits and vegetables can be expensive, but they are refreshing and nutrient rich.
- Some food providers are more flexible and willing to try different options.
- Look beyond your personal preferences.



Three quick keys to planning foods that are enjoyable and healthy:

- **What?** Include items that are moderate or low in terms of fat and sugar and, therefore, calories.
- **How much?** Keep portion sizes reasonable.
- **When?** Timing is important:
 - Most of us don't need extra calories at mid-morning or mid-afternoon.
 - Snacks make some people drowsy especially in the afternoon.
- Other people need a small pick-me-up in the morning or afternoon.
 - ⇒ *Beverages can meet this need.*
 - ⇒ *When serving a snack, try to keep it light – like fresh or dried fruit. Also, hard candy and gum can provide people with a little something that helps maintain alertness without being calorie laden.*
 - ⇒ *Don't overlook stretch breaks and other short physical activities that can help refresh people in ways that don't involve eating.*



Choices...

Low-fat and fat-free versions of cottage cheese, sour cream, and cream cheese can make some delicious dips and spreads. Check them out! But also remember that everything doesn't have to be low-fat, fat-free, or sugar-free. Controlling portion size of high-calorie items allows us to have our cake and eat it, too.

Avoid portion distortion

- Serve bagel bites or cut full-size bagels in quarters.
- Offer mini-muffins.
- Provide individual portion packets with items like potato or corn chips.
- Slice sandwiches into halves or, depending on their size, into quarters.
- Cut large items – like lemon bars and brownies – into smaller pieces.
- Slice cheese thinly or cut into small chunks.
- Whenever possible, use small- to medium-sized cups and dishes depending on what is being served. That's because today's dinner plates hold almost two-thirds more food than plates manufactured 20 to 30 years ago!
- For more information about portion distortion, go to <http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/index.htm>.



Tips for working successfully with caterers and other food providers

- Try to select a food provider open to offering food that is enjoyable as well as healthy.
- Don't be afraid to ask caterers if they can try a healthier alternative.
- Appreciate that food providers have their own constraints, and find out what those are. Then try to make arrangements that work for both of you.
 - When asking for a special menu item or modification, try to select something reasonably easy to make and serve or that is similar to something the provider already offers.
 - If your needs are met, express your gratitude and offer to recommend the food provider to other food planners.



Don't be afraid to ask caterers if they can try a healthier alternative.

Cost cutter...

If possible, buy items like fruit and bottled water at a grocery store instead of having them provided by a caterer.

Always try to offer some type of fruit or vegetable ... or both!



How about...



Quick but special how-to

Fruit salsa – diced fruit of your choice, for example, strawberries, apples, pears, kiwis, etc., mixed with orange zest, a squeeze of lemon, and a bit of honey or sugar. Serve with flour tortilla triangles dusted with cinnamon and sugar and baked in the oven. Yum!

Main items

- Deviled eggs . . . for breakfast meetings.
- Chili – different kinds, like white varieties made with shredded chicken or ground turkey as well as traditional recipes with cubed or ground beef or pork. Or try a meatless recipe with a variety of beans.
- Soup and . . . something – like half sandwiches or salad and bread. And try soups with a tomato or broth base instead of cheesy or cream soups. A couple of crowd pleasers: tortilla soup and hamburger and vegetable medley.

Finger foods and snack items

- Vegetables with bean dip or chunky salsa.
- Ready-made spreads or dips (like hummus – pureed garbanzo beans mixed with sesame seed butter and spices) served with vegetables or whole-grain crackers.

- Sliced fruit with sweet or spicy yogurt dip.
- Pretzels with sweet or spicy mustard dip.
- Popcorn – low-fat varieties.
- Nuts – served with a small spoon.
- Dried fruit, like apricots.

Something sweet

- Make-your-own yogurt parfaits with fresh fruit and low-fat or non-fat vanilla yogurt. To add crunch, sprinkle low-fat granola or chopped nuts on top.
- Chocolate-covered strawberries.
- Angel food cake cubes and fruit chunks with flavored yogurt dip.
- Smoothies made by blending fruit with juice and/or low-fat or non-fat yogurt.
- Low-fat cottage cheese mixed with fruit – canned or fresh.
- Chunks of honeydew, watermelon, or cantaloupe with a squeeze of lime.

Beverages – Alternatives to soft drinks and sweetened beverages:

- Almost everyone likes bottled water.
- How about ice water with sliced lemon, lime, and orange in a clear glass jug? For a change, try adding a couple of slices of cucumber.
- Juice spritzers – fruit juice and club soda with a squeeze of lemon or lime – are very refreshing.
- Got milk? Many people enjoy low-fat or non-fat plain or chocolate varieties.
- Italian sodas are refreshing and easy to make: Put a spoonful of flavored syrup (like hazelnut or raspberry) in a glass with ice, fill with plain or flavored club soda, and add a squeeze of lemon, lime, or orange.
- Herbal teas can be very appealing – regular or decaffeinated, iced or hot.

Other ideas:

- Slice foods like apples so they are easier to eat. (Tip: A bit of orange or lemon juice squeezed on fruit like apples and pears will prevent them from turning brown.)
- Offer mayonnaise, dressings, and sauces, etc., on the side.
- At retreats or other meetings, try delaying dessert until the afternoon instead of serving it immediately after lunch.
- Make sure to offer vegetarian options.
- Who says “break” has to mean food?
 - ⇒ Water is always a winner but check out the other beverage ideas above, too.
 - ⇒ Plan an optional physical activity either self-guided with clear instructions or led by an individual at the front of the room.





Why do we need some fresh ideas?

- As time goes by, more people of all ages are eating too much and not getting enough physical activity. This often prevents people from attaining and achieving a healthy weight¹.
- Most people don't eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Individuals are responsible for the choices they make, but people's environments – homes, workplaces, schools, etc. – influence available choices.
- Food at social events can be an opportunity for people to try new foods.
- Colleges and universities want to be seen as up-to-date places of learning and new ideas.

¹ As defined by Joanne Ikeda of the University of California at Berkeley's Center for Weight and Health, "a healthy weight is the weight you achieve when you have a healthy lifestyle." Accordingly, body weight is one important indicator of health, but there are other important indicators, too. These include blood pressure, levels of fat in the blood (for example, triglycerides and high-density lipoprotein [HDL] and low-density lipoprotein [LDL] cholesterol), fruit and vegetable intakes, frequency and duration of physical activity, etc. Additional publications in the *Focus on Health, Not Weight* series provide information on other aspects of healthy lifestyles related to food and eating, physical activity, and body image.

Challenges presented by potlucks:

- Most people want to bring party favorites. When these items are high in calories, portion control can be a helpful strategy.
- People often decide at the last minute what they want to bring but try posting or circulating an optional sign-up sheet – maybe with categories. Some people will welcome this. And who knows – "pot planneds" might just catch on as a good idea!
- Hurry-up potluck ideas
 - ⇒ Just grapes: Wash, dry, cut into small clusters and serve.
 - ⇒ Fruit kabobs: Chunks of fruit on coffee stirrer sticks.
 - ⇒ Quicker dipper: Warmed, canned bean dip in a pretty bowl surrounded by baby carrots, pretzels, and cucumber slices on a decorative plate.

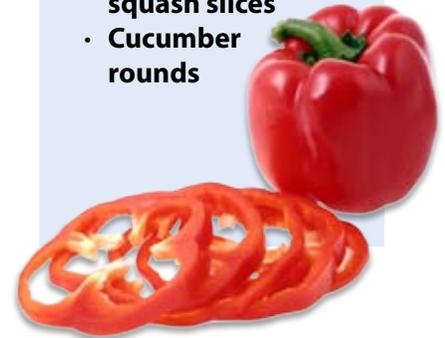


Desserts can be enjoyable without being rich...

A *trifle* is an elegant dessert made with plain cake often soaked in some kind of liquor and topped with jam, jelly, custard, and whipped cream. To make a delicious lighter version, cut angel food cake and spread layers with low-fat pudding, whipped topping, or yogurt, and sprinkle with berries or chopped fruit.

How to vary your veggies...

- **Baby carrots**
– blanch or steamed with a little honey and chili powder
- **Broccoli and cauliflower**
– lightly steamed
- **Green, red, or yellow bell pepper wedges**
- **Zucchini or yellow squash slices**
- **Cucumber rounds**



For more specific guidance regarding healthful offerings, check out these Web sites:

- www.sph.umn.edu/img/assets/9103/Nutrition_Guide.pdf
- www.catertohealth.org/gpagebreak.html
- www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/hot_topics/ES%20Healthy%20Meeting%20Guide.pdf

A downloadable version of this publication is available at www.uwyo.edu/CES/PUBS/MP112-3.pdf.

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