

# Healthy Meeting Tips and Tricks: Eat Smart, Move More Lesson Guide

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## Introduction

Most American adults get too little physical activity and spend more than half their waking hours being sedentary. In addition, most do not eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. These factors can negatively affect health, leading to increased chronic disease risk, obesity, and premature death.

There's good evidence (for both nutrition and physical activity) that the choices we are presented with, and how they are presented, strongly affect the decision we end up making. As some of us spend many hours in meetings, changing meeting practices can help us eat well and fit enough physical activity into our days. Setting policies, resolutions, or value statements around these healthy practices can help us build a culture of wellness in our organizations and workplaces.

### Target Audiences

- EHC Leaders and Members

### Objectives

- Participants will increase knowledge of nutrition and physical activity guidelines
- Participants will increase knowledge of how to establish healthy meeting practices
- Participants will assess health practices of a recent meeting

### Materials

- Teaching guide
- Presentation
- Healthy meeting assessment

### Suggestions for Teaching

- Before the lesson, review this lesson guide and the healthy meeting assessment.
- Review the PowerPoint presentation, which includes notes for each slide.
- Make copies of the healthy meeting assessment for each participant.

### Suggested Use

After teaching the lesson using the PowerPoint presentation or this guide, ask participants to

complete the included healthy meeting assessment. As a group, discuss which healthy meeting practices have already been established and which could be improved upon. Decide on one or two small changes that can be made at the next meeting. You can continue to use the healthy meeting assessment at future meetings to assess changes you've made to your meeting practices.

## Teaching the Lesson

First, let's start with an activity to get us up and moving a bit. If you ate breakfast this morning, please stand up. Okay, you can sit down. If you went shopping last night, please stand up. Okay, you can sit down. And if you're tired of the \_\_\_\_\_ weather, please stand up. Okay, you can sit down. (Fill in the three prompts with any activities you like.)

To get started, let me ask you all about your experiences with food and physical activity options at meetings. Does anyone want to share what their experience has been? (Solicit responses).

For those who are working, we often spend many of our waking hours in meetings. For those who are fortunate enough to be retired, you may still end up spending lots of your time in meetings – like this one. Throughout this lesson, we'll try to focus on ways you could improve the practices of your EHC meetings.

There's good evidence (for both nutrition and physical activity) that the choices we are presented with, and how they are presented, strongly affect the decision we end up making. For example, if you're at a meeting or event with a plate of cookies in front of you, you may end up reaching for a cookie – even though you weren't hungry or were thinking about eating fruit instead. And if you're sitting for several hours – or all day – in a meeting, it can be difficult to fit enough physical activity into your day.

So we want to set policies, resolutions, or value statements around these healthy practices. This can help us build a culture of wellness in our organizations and workplaces. Just starting the conversation and modeling the importance of these choices is a good first step.

Why does Extension care about this? In 2014, Cooperative Extension's National Framework for Health and Wellness was created, with a goal of increasing the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life. We can do this through supporting healthy choices that can prevent and manage chronic disease. And you are part of this – starting from within our own organization to build a culture of health! If we can achieve our goals, Extension can do for the nation's health what it did for American agriculture.

To understand how to improve our meeting practices, let's talk about nutrition first. Most of us eat excessively large portion sizes, too much saturated and trans fat, sodium, added sugars, and refined grains, and do not eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The dietary guidelines for Americans encourage us to eat more fruits and vegetables, and whole grains. The guidelines also recommend varying our protein sources and choosing low fat dairy. Eating appropriate portion sizes – as MyPlate guides us to do – can also help.

As for the physical activity guidelines, there are two parts. The first is aerobic activity, which involves free oxygen and gets your heart rate up. It's recommended to do 150 minutes, or two and a half hours, of moderate intensity aerobic activity per week. Or, you can do half that amount – 75 minutes – of vigorous intensity physical activity per week. What's the difference? The easiest way to tell is with the talk test. If you can sing, you're doing light intensity aerobic activity. If you can't sing, but you can talk, that's mod-

erate intensity. And if it's hard to talk – you can only get out a few words at a time – that's vigorous intensity. The second part of the recommendations is for muscle-strengthening activities. It's recommended to do two sessions per week that target the major muscle groups. Anything counts that involves having muscles work or hold against a force or weight – this could be lifting weights, doing body weight exercises, doing yoga or Pilates, or even heavy yardwork.

But wait, there's more! Sedentary behavior – that is, sitting for long periods of time – is distinct from physical activity and has been shown to be a health risk in itself. Meeting the guidelines for physical activity does not cancel out the ill effects of too much sitting during the day. Studies have found a strong relationship between sitting and chronic disease.

Next I'll share with you some hacks – or easy ways to make changes to your meetings to encourage healthy eating and physical activity.

- Offer infused water in place of soda or other sugary drinks. You can experiment with fruits, vegetables, and mint to add some variety. Unsweetened tea and coffee are also good options.
- Simply using smaller plates, bowls, and serving utensils can encourage smaller portions and prevent overeating.
- Place fruits and vegetables first in the buffet line. Research shows we are more likely to eat what we see first. If you're setting out food for a group, try placing the fruits and vegetables first – and dessert last.
- Or – instead of serving traditional desserts, which are usually high calorie with lots of added fat and sugar, try just serving fruit as your dessert.
- Serve dressings and condiments on the side. Too much dressing can add excess calories to otherwise nutritious salads. Serve dressing on the side so your fellow meeting-goers can take only what they need.
- Serve veggies with hummus instead of ranch dip for another easy swap. Hummus is lower in calories and saturated fat and higher in fiber than ranch dip.
- Organize a walking group during meeting breaks. If you're planning on meeting for more than an hour or so, try scheduling a walking break. Taking a break to be active promotes good health and improves productivity through increasing concentration and energy levels.
- Provide “workout time” in the agenda. If you're involved in planning an all-day meeting or a conference, provide time in the agenda for attendees to do morning or evening workouts, or plan extra time around lunch for physical activity. You could also arrange for early morning or evening fitness classes, like aerobics, yoga, or tai chi.

## **Additional Resources**

If you want to formalize your commitment to healthy meetings, work with your group to agree on healthy meeting practices and keep the form somewhere you'll see it often. Here's some resources that may be helpful.

- There's a healthy meeting toolkit from the Center for Science in the Public Interest that you can view online. It includes ideas for promoting good nutrition, physical activity, and also sustainability

– like minimizing waste and encouraging recycling: <https://cspinet.org/protecting-our-health/nutrition/healthy-meetings>

- There are other resources on the CSPI healthy meetings website, like suggested guidelines and more hacks.
- The CDC, or centers for disease control, also has tips for healthier meetings, including both physical activity and nutrition: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/tips-for-offering-healthier-options-and-pa-at-workplace-508.pdf>
- Here is another source of sample meeting guidelines: <http://www.wellness.uci.edu/ucihealthy-meetingguidelines.pdf>