Introduction and Rationale

Creating a culture of health and wellness in meetings and conferences is an important way to help people eat well and be physically active, foster healthier work environments, and cultivate social norms around healthier choices and behaviors.

Studies show a strong relationship between the physical and social environments of the workplace and the health behaviors of employees. Nearly half of most people’s waking hours are spent at work, and many of those hours are spent in meetings and conferences. Unfortunately, the foods and beverages available at meetings and conferences are often high in saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium, and contain few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Currently, many people in America eat excessively large portion sizes, too much saturated and trans fat, sodium, added sugars, and refined grains, and not enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Implementing healthy meeting standards helps to create a supportive environment that cultivates a culture of health and helps employees and students to eat well. Adopting healthy meeting standards sends the message that health is important to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and that we support the health of our community. It models healthy behavior and supports the health promotion efforts of our school, ensuring that we “walk the walk.”

Harvard University Dining Services’ Sebastian’s Café supports healthy meeting recommendations with a range of convenient service and menu selections, and is happy to work collaboratively with you to create unique menus tailored to your guests’ tastes. When planning an event, talk to the manager or chef at Sebastian’s—they are happy to work with you to develop an appropriate menu and address any allergies, religious dietary restrictions, or concerns you may have about the food.

In the recommendations that follow, the symbol “★” signifies that Sebastian’s fulfills that recommendation by default. All other recommendations are readily supported by Sebastian’s upon your request.
**Nutrition: Food**

- Offer fruits and/or vegetables every time food is served.
- Provide a vegetarian option.
- If serving breakfast, aim for choices like steel-cut oatmeal, plain yogurt, fruit, nuts, and/or eggs. Avoid serving pastries or muffins, but if specifically requested for a catered event, offer whole grain pastries and muffins with fruits and nuts, and cut them in half.
- For lunches, breaks, or regular meetings serve fruit as dessert. For snacks, serve nuts, vegetables, and fruits.
- When planning an event with under 25 people, consider using a buffet, or asking your guests beforehand if they would prefer a half or full portion for their meal.
- Offer reasonable portion sizes. In buffet lines or self-service, support sensible portions by offering reasonably sized entrees and appropriately sized serving utensils and plates.
- Use whole grains whenever possible (100% whole grain or whole grain as the first ingredient), instead of refined grains and potatoes.
- Serve healthier condiments and dressings in bottles and offer them on the side. Do not offer fat free dressings as flavor and taste are usually achieved by adding sugar and salt.
- Offer lower-sodium options.
- When offering meat, serve only poultry, fish, and shellfish. Avoid processed and red meats.
- For special occasions and dinner, cut desserts in half or serve small portions.
- Offer foods prepared in a healthy way (grilled, baked, poached, roasted, braised, or broiled).

**Nutrition: Beverages**

- Make water or sparkling water the default beverage.
- Only offer unsweetened or non-caloric beverages. When serving 100% juice, consider diluting it with water or sparkling water, or offering it in 8 oz glasses.
- Offer low-fat or non-fat milk with coffee and tea service in addition to or in place of half and half.