



TOOLKIT: **Healthy Vending Options**

Blue Zones-certified worksites support well-being by ensuring the healthy choice is the easy choice in vending machines for people at work.

ABOUT 100 MILLION AMERICANS USE ONE OF THE NATION'S 7 MILLION VENDING MACHINES EVERY DAY.ⁱ People use at least one third of these vending machines while at work.ⁱⁱ Packaged foods and beverages—high in sugar and saturated fat—are often the main features in vending machines^{iii, iv} These types of beverages and “ultra-processed foods,”^v account for over half of American’s energy intake and 90% of added sugar intake.^{vi}

Nutrition experts increasingly recommend diets based mostly on unprocessed or minimally processed foods, while avoiding consumption of ultra-processed foods.^{vii, viii, ix} This well-established research suggests that significant change is in order for conventional vending options to ensure these foods support health and well-being.

This toolkit offers guidelines, best practices, and resources for adopting worksite vending policies and best practices that will make your worksite stand out as a leader in health and well-being.

WHAT’S INSIDE:

-  **What’s Involved** - A description of the phases and components involved in shifting to healthier vending options
-  **What To Do** - Step-by-step best practices to improve the nutritional value of vending options that can be phased in over time
-  **What’s Out There** - Case studies that describe what worksites across the country are doing to offer healthy options in their vending machines
-  **What’s Healthy** - Blue Zones-approved nutrition guidelines for foods and beverages sold in vending machines
-  **What’s Helpful** - Useful resources that offer a deeper dive and useful information to guide your efforts to improve the nutritional value of your vending options

ⁱUltra-processed foods are one of four food groups in the NOVA food classification system (which classifies foods according to the extent and purpose of food processing), rather than in terms of nutrients.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

What are the stages of changing vending options?

Removing unhealthy options is a major and beneficial step in reducing access to unhealthy foods. It can reduce unnecessary snacking.^x Offering an entirely or mostly healthy product mix is a reliable strategy to support employee health, sends clear signals about worksite culture and values, and encourage healthy choices—without reducing sales revenue!^{xi, xii} Simply promoting healthy vending choices or improving information (i.e. calorie labeling) while retaining mostly unhealthy options is unlikely to make an impact.

There are several steps involved in shifting the kinds of options you provide to employees in your vending machines. Each step requires time, leadership, and engagement of relevant stakeholders. This toolkit offers guidance for each step in the process; check the resources section of this toolkit to find online resources to support your work.



1. INFORMATION

- Determine which vending machines you would like to change
- Identify what changes you'd like to make to the offerings (e.g., healthy beverages; no chips)



2. PARTNERS

- Survey employees to find out what they would like to see
- Engage purchasing director and vending company



3. LEADERSHIP

- Gain support from relevant leadership to approve vending policy changes



4. GUIDELINES/POLICY

- Review and approve Blue Zones vending nutrition guidelines
- Draft and approve policy or mechanism describing guidelines



5. ROADBLOCKS

- Communicate health benefits to allay resistance



6. IMPLEMENTATION

- ID champion to lead implementation
- Pilot options with taste tests
- Phase in healthy items

Make sure at every stage, you are:

- CONNECTING AND ENGAGING – Ask people what they'd like to see
- COMMUNICATING AND INCLUDING – Share progress and involve people in decision-making and implementation
- PHASING IN – Make gradual changes to help consumers and your vending companies adjust; improve approach guided by feedback

WHAT TO DO

What can we do to improve the nutritional value of our vending options?

This ‘cheat sheet’ is a helpful roadmap for the best practices to make sure your vending program aligns with Blue Zones-approved nutrition guidelines. Implementing each of these three phases in a sequential way can help everyone get used to the new approach, from employees to leadership to your vending machine supplier.

Using a range of strategies to support healthy choices, such as providing a healthy product mix, preferred placement of healthy options, subsidizing the cost of healthy options (and/or increasing the price of less nutritious options), and marketing healthy options, can help generate support for the changes and encourage healthy behaviors. Remember, it’s not just what’s in the machine, it’s the prompts and encouragement that help change behavior. Placing preferred products in more desirable spots in a vending machine, using differential pricing (subsidizing healthy options, or increasing cost of less healthy options), and marketing healthy products (using color-coded signs) can be helpful. Layering these strategies on to a changed product mix provides multiple nudges to support healthy choices.^{xiii, xiv}

What To Do	What’s Involved	Getting Started	Making Progress	Healthy Vending ★ Champions ★
Engage and foster buy-in	Thoughtful processes to communicate, include, and obtain feedback from employees sets the stage for change and acceptance	<p>Talk to employees before making changes, emphasizing how new vending practices will align with Blue Zones worksite certification.</p> <p>Emphasize the positive vision of health and well-being for all.</p> <p>Vending changes are least popular when first proposed or ‘on paper.’</p>	<p>Continue to engage employees about items phased in and out to gauge support and integrate feedback.</p> <p>Expect some push-back, and for the pushback to fade. Some tension, especially in the beginning, is a natural part of the change process and should fade over time.</p> <p>Offer taste tests of new items to employees, taking their preferences into account.</p>	Once implemented, changes are much more likely to be accepted. ^{xv}

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Do your homework.	Assessment; policy & guidelines approval; and contract negotiation are three key steps in the change process.	If desired, conduct vending machine assessment to guide priorities and identify needs. You can do your own assessment or use this tool - http://www.nems-v.com/ Adopt Blue Zones healthy vending guidelines.	Share healthy vending guidelines and planned changes with vending machine company.	Renegotiate contracts with your current supplier or change suppliers if they cannot meet your vending requirements. Resources below provide a sample healthy vending contract and other resources to guide you through the vendor engagement and negotiation process.
Phase in Healthy Options	Gradual introduction and promotion of new products helps vending machine contractors and employees alike adjust to new changes.	Eliminate energy drinks from vending machine. Introduce at least two healthy beverage selections in the vending machine (unsweetened still and sparkling water; unsweetened iced tea). Introduce at least two healthy food options in the vending machine (dry roasted almonds, trail mix) that comply with recommended serving sizes in Blue Zones vending machine guidelines.	Ensure 50% of items sold in vending machines conform to Blue Zones nutrition guidelines. Place healthy options in most visible places inside vending machines; place unhealthy options at the bottom of the machine. Add branded Blue Zones window clings and color-coded signage to promote healthy options.	Ensure all items sold in vending machine comply with Blue Zones vending nutrition guidelines. Make other positive changes to the food environment while changing vending practices—such as making sure that cool, clean water easily accessible and free of cost. Some employers have replaced their vending machines with bowls of fruit and clean, cool water in the breakroom to great success.

If you want to ensure your efforts to offer healthier items are successful, here's a short list of things you should avoid doing:

- ✗ Don't make changes before engaging staff and other stakeholders
- ✗ Don't emphasize the unhealthiness of existing options and the importance of taking them out of machines
- ✗ Don't roll back recent or intended changes at the first sign of discontent. Stay the course!
- ✗ Don't make minimal changes to product mix (unless options offered are already healthy)
- ✗ Don't place healthy options at the bottom of machines, or in other less preferred locations
- ✗ Don't implement product option, placement, pricing, and promotion strategies individually. Research demonstrates that these strategies are most effective when implemented together (i.e. subsidizing and promoting healthy options)

Nutrition Guidelines for Food and Beverages Sold in Vending Machines

Globally, nutrition experts increasingly recommend diets based mostly on unprocessed or minimally processed foods, while avoiding consumption of ultra-processed foods.^{x, xi, xii} These guidelines can help determine your decisions for what food and beverages to order from caterers and serve at your meetings/events. These recommendations comply with Blue Zones-approved nutrition guidelines.

VENDING CATEGORY	NUTRITION RECOMMENDATIONS	PORTION RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLES/IDEAS
Water	Provide access to free, chilled, potable water in addition to vended beverages Plain and carbonated water with no caloric or artificial sweeteners	None	Install one or several drinking fountains with water bottle filling option
Milk	Cow's milk should be 1% fat or less Plant-based milks should be fortified with calcium and vitamin D, and unsweetened Total calories should be less than 150 calories per 8oz serving for all milks	≤ 12 oz	
Juice	100% fruit or vegetable juice with no added sweeteners	Standard serving of juice is 4oz. Vended options should be ≤ 12 oz, if possible	Bottled juice 100% fruit juice boxes/pouches Fruit/vegetable juice mixes
Coffee/Tea	Offer caffeinated and decaf options, both unsweetened Provide sugar and other additions as options on the side	None	
Sports/Energy Drinks	Sports drinks are not recommended unless at a facility where people are doing vigorous physical activity and have a need for them Energy drinks are not recommended.		
Soda	Worksite are encouraged to eliminate soda from their vending operations If soda is offered, provide 1-2 options each of regular and diet soda		

Packaged Foods/Snacks	General guidance: When selecting snack options, include a mix of sweet/savory snacks as well as snacks that provide variety and options in terms of the three macronutrients (the nutrients that provide energy): protein, carbohydrate, and fat.		
Calories	≤ 250 calories per serving	Select packages that contain no more than 1 serving per package	Ideas for vended snacks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Packages of nuts like almonds, cashews, peanuts etc. (choose unsalted or lightly salted) ✓ Look for ingredients such as “whole grain, whole wheat” ✓ Whole grain crackers ✓ Fresh fruit ✓ Fresh vegetables ✓ Trail mix with nuts, seeds & dried fruit or chocolate pieces ✓ Whole grain cereal ✓ Hummus w/pretzels or pita ✓ No-sugar added applesauce cups ✓ Single serve yogurt or cottage cheese ✓ String cheese ✓ Baked chips or pita chips ✓ Plain oatmeal packets (dried - if hot water is available)
Fat	Trans fat free	For nuts, serving size should be ≤ 1.5oz	
Sodium	Choose lower-sodium options, ideally ≤240mg sodium per serving		
Entrees			
Calories	≤400 kcal per package/item		
Total Fat	≤ 35% of calories from fat		
Sodium	≤480 mg per package/item		

WHAT'S OUT THERE

When and where it works: case studies of healthy vending

Employers and communities of all sizes across the country are implementing healthy vending policies. Here are some examples of worksites around the country that have introduced healthy vending policies and nutritious options in their vending machines and provide creative, ongoing ways to ensure these changes are successful:

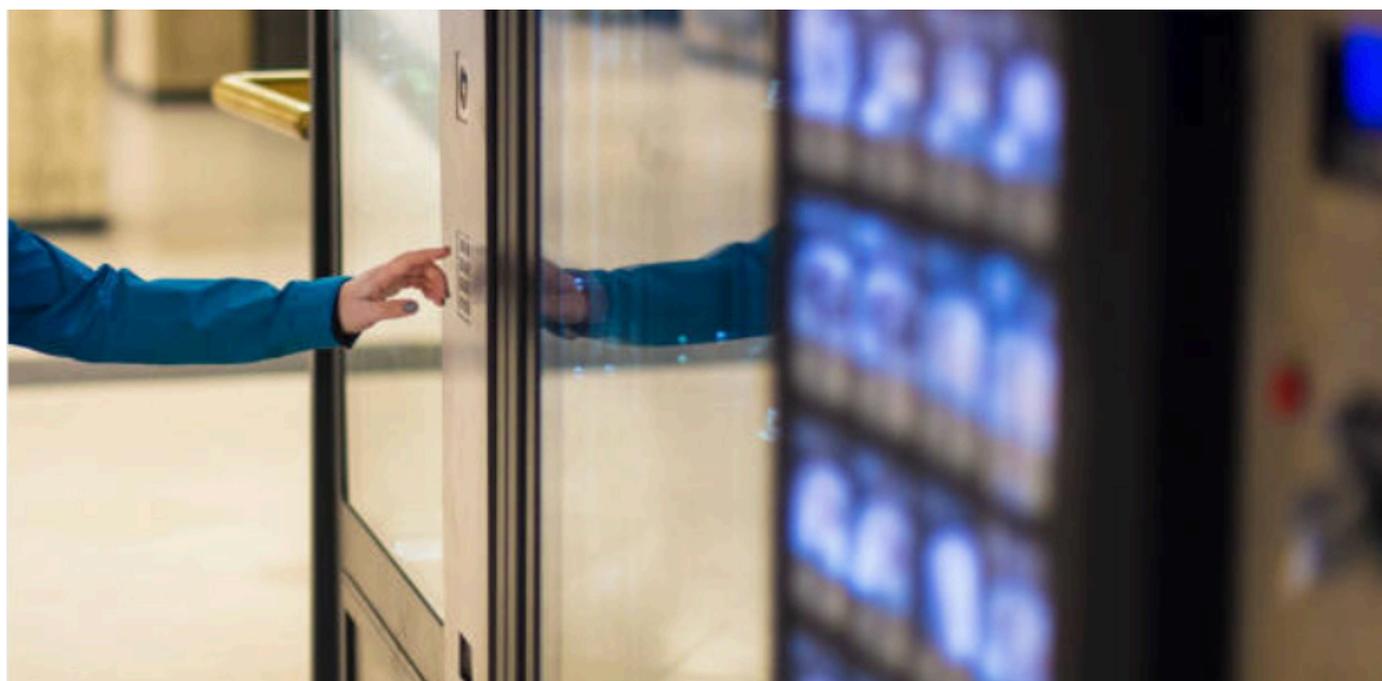
- » THE STATE OF ALABAMA implemented a healthy vending policy across numerous state buildings, requiring 50% of foods and 100% of beverages sold to meet nutritional guidelines. They conducted ongoing marketing and promotions, including taste tests to promote consumer acceptance. A growing number of worksites in Alabama are shifting to a healthy vending approach. After an initial dip in sales, overall vending sales increased, over 90% of employees in these worksites are now able to identify healthy vending options, and employees are highly satisfied with the changes.^{xxix}
- » SAN DIEGO COUNTY approved a healthy vending policy. For county facilities that serve youth, 100% of food and beverages sold in vending machines must meet nutrition standards outlined in the policy. All other county facilities must offer 50% of vending options that comply with nutrition standards. Vending machine use and revenue have remained stable before and after implementation of this policy.^{xxx}
- » DALLAS COUNTY, IOWA, requires all of its vending machines to feature at least 30% healthy items, which has been adopted by two other counties. Every vending machine features an easy-to-understand healthy food coding system, so people can easily select the healthy item at a glance. This strategy for improving the nutritional quality of vended foods has been expanded statewide.^{xxxi}
- » NEW YORK CITY has a healthy vending policy in place that dictates marketing, nutrition education, and pricing to encourage healthy choices. The City must approve any promotional materials featured on the exterior panels of the vending machine; only healthy options may be promoted. Pricing should encourage healthy choices, where healthiest options are the lowest cost. Water must be placed in the highest selling position in the machine, and high calorie beverages must be placed in the lowest selling position. These standards have increased the availability of healthy foods throughout the city. Many vendors have adjusted their sourcing practices and numerous manufacturers have reformulated their products to comply with these new standards.^{xxxii}
- » BALDWIN PARK, CALIFORNIA, provides required yearly training for city staff to ensure compliance with healthy vending regulations. This ensures ongoing adherence to the policy and enables staff to keep on top of trends and new healthy options. During the initial six months, the city experienced a dip in sales, but after six months revenue returned to and stayed at previous levels.^{xxxiii}

WHAT'S HELPFUL

What resources are available, if we're thinking about changing our vending machine offerings?

If you're thinking about improving the nutritional quality of food options in your vending machines, there are a lot of publicly available toolkits, sample policies, and vending contracts. Don't reinvent the wheel! Instead, take full advantage of the good work that has already been done. Here are several of the nation's best healthy vending resources:

- **Public Places Should Offer Better Options: It's time to Restock our Future** (Voices for Healthy Kids): A superb set of resources for getting started with healthy vending, developing guidelines and policies, implementation, financial implications, and tips for working with vendors
- **Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit** (American Heart Association, American Stroke Association): See pages 7-10 for getting started, and pages 19 and 20 for tips on vending
- **Making Change: A Guide to Healthier Vending for Municipalities** (ChangeLab Solutions)
- **Model Healthy Municipal Snack and Beverage Vending Agreement** (ChangeLab Solutions): Sample vendor contract language to implement a healthy vending policy
- **King County Healthy Vending Guidelines** (Public Health—Seattle & King County): A widely-cited example of healthy vending guidelines adopted by a U.S. County
- **King County Healthy Vending Implementation Toolkit** (Public Health—Seattle & King County): An accompanying guide for developing and implementing a healthy vending policy
- **Healthy Choice Options in Vending Machines on County Property** (County of San Diego, CA): Another example of healthy vending policy language



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by sharecare