

Ten Steps to On-Site Healthy Dining Success



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FOODSERVICE WELLNESS
INSTITUTE



The pressure is on! The food service industry is expected to meet the strong demand for wellness...

But there are challenges!

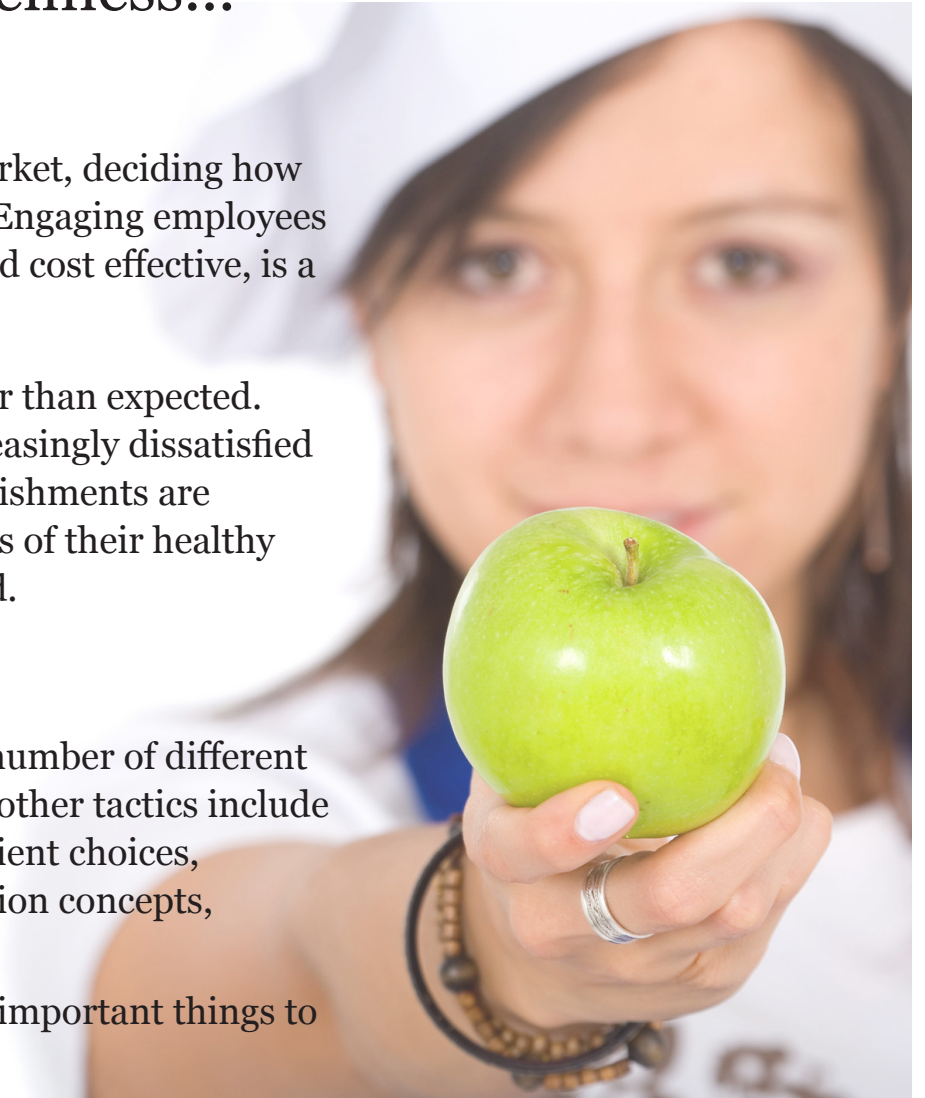
With all the conflicting nutrition theories on the market, deciding how to position a wellness offer is a very complex issue. Engaging employees is not easy. Finding healthy recipes that are tasty and cost effective, is a difficult task.

In addition, sales and participation are usually lower than expected. This dilemma results from consumers who are increasingly dissatisfied with the healthy choices being offered. Many establishments are resorting to “diet” food and half portions as the basis of their healthy offer, which leave customers hungry and dissatisfied.

Rising above the challenges!

Healthy dining programs can be implemented in a number of different ways. Besides adding healthier features to a menu, other tactics include alternate healthier preparation methods and ingredient choices, healthier sides in combination specials, healthy station concepts, nutrition labeling, and more.

But no matter what the approach, the following are important things to consider to maximize success.



The Ten Steps To Healthy Dining Success

1. Ensure Credibility With a Strong Foundation Based on Science & Legislation

As tempting as it may be to incorporate the latest fad, don't sacrifice your credibility in the marketplace and run the risk of having to change your whole concept when the fad dies.

Fads come and go. Remember when Atkins (now referred to as “Fadkins”) took a great fall? The fad took off at the beginning of the millennium but shortly after, questions arose from the medical community about the diet's long-term effects. In 2003, a fickle public ditched low-carb for low-fat! Not too long after that, low-carb gained popularity again, and guess what? The next fad is around the corner.

Keep in mind that you will always come out ahead if you base your theory on credible scientific fact. You cannot meet the dietary needs of every customer but to best meet the majority of needs, incorporate reputable guidelines from leading organizations such as The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the US Dietary Guidelines for Americans, as examples.

In addition, be savvy in regards to nutrition labeling, regulations and claims. Use reputable sources to analyze your menu items and visit www.FDA.org to ensure that you are following legislation regarding health claims. Inaccuracy in may lead to potential consumer litigation regarding deceptive marketing tactics based on faulty nutritional numbers and information.

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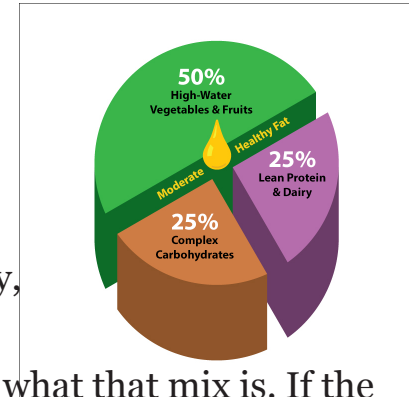
“Too bad it was a typo. I was doing pretty well on the low-crab diet!”



2. Clearly Define Your Healthy Dining Criteria

Depending on whom you ask, there are numerous definitions for “healthy.” Therefore, it’s important to clearly define the underlying healthy dining principles of your healthy dining offer. This will not only add to your credibility, it will simplify your approach.

For example, if your healthy dining offer follows a balanced food mix, indicate what that mix is. If the items are less than a certain number of calories or meet criteria for other nutrients, clearly define what those are. If the ingredients are “clean” with no artificial additives and preservatives, non-GMO and so forth, indicate that as well. As mentioned earlier, there are several ways to design a healthy dining offer and both consumers and employees need to understand the foundational principles of the approach.



3. Ensure Your Strategy Best Meets the Needs of Your Customers

Are you catering to Gen Z, millennials or baby boomers? There are differences in the way your dining offer needs to be structured to best meet their needs. In addition, the way consumers view wellness and what drives them to purchase is constantly evolving. Stay on top of the latest market research and ensure you are meeting the needs of your target consumers.

For example, today’s consumers are grouped into three general categories: For the “Free From Buyers”, **less is more**. They are seeking menu items lower in elements they are trying to control such as calories, fat, sodium, and allergens. For the “Nutrient Content Buyers”, **more is more**. They are seeking foods high in elements they want more of, such as vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and protein, as examples. The “Naturally Oriented Buyers” want menu items that are **back to basics** without artificial additives, preservatives and non-GMO verified.

4. Consider Your Operational Needs

Don't try to be everything to everyone. Be realistic in terms of what you can implement well!

Simplicity is important. As further explained below, it's important for consumers, but also just as important for the operation.

The program should provide benefits, whether that be financial as a good return on investment, client and customer retention, a strong competitive edge, and/or customer improved health, as examples.



5. Keep It Simple



This is one of the hardest things to accomplish, as nutrition can be such a complex subject.

Use straightforward nutrition guidelines so that customers don't have to decipher complicated charts, or sort through multiple icons to determine what is healthy! The program needs to make the concept of healthy eating fun and easy, not stressful and complicated.

Use effective marketing and signage that clearly directs customers to the healthy choices and makes the concept easy to understand and apply.

6. Don't Go Overboard! Small Changes Yield Better Results

The best way to maximize participation is by taking a moderate approach. Health advocates are recommending that Americans meet very aggressive goals such as keeping sodium levels to less than 1500 mg for the entire day, no added sugar and extreme portion size reductions. However, do you think you are going to maximize participation and change eating habits by offering meals that are half the size with no added salt, sugar and fat?

Consider that your customers are used to eating meals such as this:

The Cheesecake Factory's Breakfast Burrito with a whopping 2,730 calories, and 73 grams of saturated fat. AMC Movie Theater's Bavarian Legend Soft Pretzel with 7,600 milligrams of sodium. Chili's Honey-Chipotle Crispers & Waffles with 2,510 calories, 4,480 milligrams of sodium and 105 grams of sugar. Bonefish Grill's Mussels Josephine with 120 grams of fat!

Changing eating habits takes time. Ensure you incorporate credible health guidelines but make sure they are also liberal enough to allow for taste and satisfaction.



On The Border Fish Tacos with Rice and Black Beans 1,980 calories, 103 grams fat, 4,700 mg sodium,

7. Take a Positive, Non-diet Approach: Focus on Taste and Satisfaction First, Health Second

Consumers are tired of hearing about what not to eat and how to diet. Refocus thinking from “diet and deprivation” to “eating and satisfaction” by offering full portions of healthy, yet tasty and filling favorites. For example, prepare beef tacos with leaner meat, offer one instead of two, and fill the rest of the plate with rice and salad. Prepare pizzas on whole grain crust and top them with lower fat mozzarella cheese and more vegetables. The opportunities are endless.



This approach will have strong customer appeal which will fuel customer satisfaction, loyalty and business growth. It will attract even those not interested in wellness because it will not be diet food, it will be delicious food... that happens to be healthy too!

8. Don't Cut Overall Portion Size: Focus on Filling Up!!



Half portions can play a role in some menu programs but using small portions as the basis of a healthy dining offer to reduce such components as calories, fat and sodium, can compromise success. You can keep the portions full and still meet healthy guidelines by simply changing the food mix. This means smaller portions of leaner protein foods, but more whole grains, and many more fruits and vegetables, which fill the plate and provide more nutrients to boot! This will provide value to customers and allow for full portion pricing thus maximizing sales and margins.

9. Give Popular Favorites an Exciting Healthy Twist

There is a way to make almost any food healthier without having to re-invent the wheel. By simply replacing some recipe ingredients and altering the proportion of food groups, as mentioned above, you can turn your menu items into delicious, healthy and satisfying menu items that sell!!



10. Train and Engage Your Employees

Training your employees to build knowledge and empower them to deliver wellness solutions with command and confidence is the cornerstone to success. Training also promotes engagement and provides consistency across the board, a fundamental key to strengthening your approach and positioning of your wellness initiative.

Contact The Food Service Wellness Institute
at info@foodservicewellnessinstitute.com for
more information on training and wellness certification





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