Vending Machines

Vending machines stocked with inexpensive, less healthy food options have the potential to harm the health of employees over time.

The most important factors in choosing foods are taste and price. Products offered in vending machines tend to be the least nutritious foods and beverages sold, and are the most convenient to purchase. By offering less healthy food choices at a low price, you may be inadvertently encouraging employees to consume less healthy foods in place of meals or healthy snacks.

Definitions of Success

- If vending machines are present, there is an emphasis on foods from the “Maximum Nutritional Value” and “Sell/Offer Most” categories. Foods from the “Sell/Offer Less” category are limited (e.g., stock 20 per cent or fewer products from this category). Foods from the “Not Recommended” category are not stocked in vending machines. See Appendix A for a description of food categories.
1.0 Needs Assessment

Assess the purpose of the vending machines in your workplace. Are they meant for employees who work shifts, who do not have access to the workplace cafeteria? Are vending machines there for snacking purposes? Are vending machines a source of revenue for fundraising purposes?

If the vending machine is present for financial purposes, assess the actual profits from the machine and determine if these funds could be raised in another manner.

2.0 Evaluation Indicators

- Assess current vending machine food offerings and determine what percentage of foods comes from each category in the Nutrition Standards in Appendix A
- After the implementation, audit the machine regularly to ensure that healthy options are present as requested and that food safety protocols are being followed. Also check to make sure that the price, placement and promotion of foods in vending machines encourage the healthiest options
- Track vending sales before and after the implementation of healthier food choices
- Note barriers, challenges and successes vending machine intervention
- Any other relevant indicators

3.0 Creating Healthy Vending Machines

3.1 Determining Employee Food Access Needs

Ask employees if they use the vending machine, how often they use it and the time of day that they typically use the machines. (One study found vending machine use to be low, with 85% of employees reporting that they infrequently or never used them.6)

Consider whether your workplace requires a snack vending machine or if staff nutrition needs can be better met through other food service options or by providing a kitchenette with a sink, fridge, microwave, toaster, hot water dispenser, etc. Also determine whether your workplace requires a beverage vending machine or if staff needs can be met by providing hot and cold water dispensers, water fountains or water and ice machines.
3.2 Implementation Considerations

Using Nutrition Standards

Emphasize products from the “Maximum Nutritional Value” and “Sell/Offer Most” categories. Limit items from the “Sell/Offer Less” category (e.g., stock 20 per cent or fewer products from this category) and avoid items from the “Not Recommended” category. See Appendix A for a description of the Nutrition Standards.

Although it is not ideal from a nutritional standpoint, the Nutrition Standards can be phased in over time. This strategy may be helpful if there is resistance to removing less healthy options from vending machines, as it provides some time for employees to get used to the changes. For example, start with 50 per cent of items coming from the “Maximum Nutritional Value” and “Sell/Offer Most” categories and work towards 80 per cent. At the same time, work on phasing out items that fall under the “Not Recommended” category.

Consider Employee ‘Choice’

It is often argued that individuals need to have both healthy and less healthy ‘choices’. However, people may consume food products simply because they are in the workplace environment, so installing a vending machine may tempt employees to consume foods they might not otherwise choose.⁶,⁸,⁹ The presence of a vending machine is a cue that can influence people to eat less healthy foods.¹⁰⁻¹³ In studies, the presence of vending machines was directly correlated with the consumption of foods high in fat and sugar.⁹,¹¹,¹⁴ Employers should not feel obligated to offer less than healthy snacks to their employees. Employees always have the option of bringing their preferred snacks to work with them, and as such, retain the right to choose what they want to eat.¹⁵

If you are making changes to existing vending machine services you may want to conduct surveys and/or a taste test event (to allow employees to sample products) to help determine what products should be stocked in the vending machine.

Price

Price foods from the “Maximum Nutritional Value” and “Sell/Offer Most” categories competitively (i.e., they should be less expensive than options from the “Sell/Offer Less” category)

Placement

Ensure the healthier items are placed in the machine so that employees notice them first (e.g., placed at eye level).

Food Safety

Have a plan in place to ensure your machines are checked at regular intervals to remove any expired products.

Ensure that vending machines containing perishable foods are kept at safe temperatures.
Working with an External Vendor

If an external vendor stocks your vending machines you will need to have a meeting with your vendor to discuss the food products that you would like to have in your machines as well as the price, placement and promotion strategy for healthier items.\textsuperscript{16}

You may include terms your written agreement with a vending company to ensure the vendor is filling the machines according to your specifications. A written agreement with your vending company would be considered a healthy eating policy.

For more information on healthy eating policies see page 185.

\textbf{Success Story: WATERLOO WELLINGTON COMMUNITY CARE ACCESS CENTRE}

The Waterloo Wellington CCAC made changes to their snack vending machine by changing options to healthier choices. After a period of time, it was determined that the vending machine was not well used and it was subsequently removed from the workplace. Initially, a few employees were dissatisfied by the removal of the machine; however, there have been no further complaints since the machine was removed.
Vending Machine References


