



# Healthy St. Mary's Partnership Healthy Meeting Toolkit





This Healthy Meeting Toolkit is intended for anyone that holds meetings and conferences. It could be used by governments, non-profits, associations, or businesses. This resource is a model that can be modified to fit the specific needs of the organization using it.

The guidance addresses five topic areas: nutrition, physical activity, food safety, tobacco-free, and sustainability. The general recommendations are intended to be followed by all organizations. In addition, each of the five topic areas is set up in a two-tiered system: Standard Healthy Meeting and Superior Healthy Meeting. Organizations can choose which tier works best for them, which can vary by topic area. For example, an organization might choose to follow the Superior Healthy Meeting recommendations for nutrition and physical activity, but use the Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations for tobacco-free and sustainability.

This toolkit was developed by the Healthy St. Mary's Partnership (HSMP) Healthy Eating & Active Living (HEAL) Action Team and is an adaptation of the toolkit developed by the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA). HSMP is a community-driven coalition of public and private partners working together to improve health in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The coalition mobilizes members through four action teams to address the priority health issues in St. Mary's: Access to Care, Behavioral Health, Healthy Eating & Active Living, and Tobacco Free Living. The HEAL action team is implementing strategies that promote healthy eating and active living in our county. These strategies focus on promoting workplace wellness, healthy eating, and exercise in school settings, creating a physical environment within a community that supports active living ("built environment"), and helping individuals make healthy eating and active living part of their lifestyles. For more information on HSMP and the HEAL action team, please visit: <http://healthystmarys.com>.





# Introduction

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. Supporting healthy food and beverage choices, providing physical activity opportunities, requiring a tobacco-free environment, and promoting sustainability are the areas of focus for the Healthy St. Mary's Partnership (HSMP) Healthy Meeting Toolkit. We encourage you to support healthier choices, provide leadership and role-modeling, and help to create a social norm around healthier choices and behaviors. We also encourage you to evaluate efforts to hold healthy meetings and conferences and make adjustments over time to continue to improve the acceptability and healthfulness of choices. This toolkit is available with expanded guidance at: <http://healthystmarys.com/healthymeeting>



## Healthy Meeting Rationale

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 fat, added sugars, and sodium, and contain few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Meetings and conferences also generally involve a lot of time sitting and provide little opportunity for physical activity — all of which reduces concentration, productivity, and energy levels.

Currently, many Americans 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. In addition, most Americans do not meet the minimum recommendation for physical activity, which is 150 minutes a week. In 2018, 22% of St. Mary's County residents over the age of 20 reported that they participated in no leisure-time activity. By adopting healthy meeting standards you can help to create a high-energy meeting environment that supports healthy choices.

By implementing healthy meeting standards your organization will create a supportive environment that cultivates a culture of health and helps employees and members to eat well, be active, reduce use of tobacco products and exposure to harmful secondhand smoke, and protect the environment. Adopting healthy meeting standards sends the message that health is important to your organization and that you support the health of your employees, members, and partners. It models healthy behavior and helps organizations and governments to “walk-the-talk.”

These standards can be used for every type of meeting, from small department-level meetings to multi-day conferences.

# Meeting Guidance

## Nutrition

### General Recommendations

- Offer nutritious food and beverage options.
- Place healthier foods and beverages in prominent positions, where they are most likely to be seen and more likely to be chosen.
- Consider not serving food at breaks that are not mealtimes

## Beverages

### Standard Healthy Meeting

- Make water the default beverage.
- Do not offer full-calorie sugar-sweetened beverages. Serve 100% juice, 100% juice diluted with water, low-fat or non-fat milk, calcium and vitamin D-fortified soymilk, or beverages with 40 calories per container or less.
- Offer low-fat or non-fat milk with coffee and tea service in addition to or in place of half and half.

### Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- Eliminate all sugar-sweetened beverages (including those with less than 40 calories per container that are allowed under the Standard Healthy Meeting).

## Food

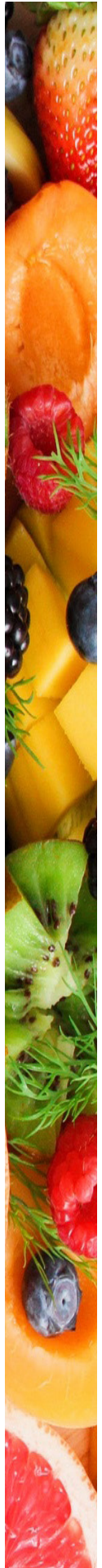
### Standard Healthy Meeting

- Offer fruits and/or vegetables every time food is served.
- 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).
- Serve healthier condiments and dressings and offer them on the side.
- Look for and try to offer lower-sodium options.
- Make the majority of the meat options poultry, fish, shellfish, or lean (unprocessed) meat.
- Provide a vegetarian option.
- For special occasions and dinner, cut desserts in half or serve small portions. For lunches, breaks, or regular meetings serve fruit as dessert.
- Do not place candy or candy bowls in the meeting space.
- Whenever possible, offer foods prepared in a healthier way (grilled, baked, poached, roasted, braised, or broiled). Avoid fried foods.

### Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- All grains must be whole grain-rich (51% or more whole grains by weight or whole grain as the first ingredient).
- Serve only poultry, fish, shellfish, or on occasion lean (unprocessed) meat options; seek alternatives to processed and red meats.
- Replace all desserts and pastries with fruit or other healthful foods.
- Do not serve fried foods.



# Physical Activity

## General Recommendation

- Offer physical activity opportunities that are relevant to the audience and environment to help people achieve at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.

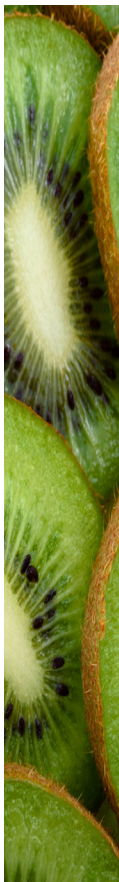
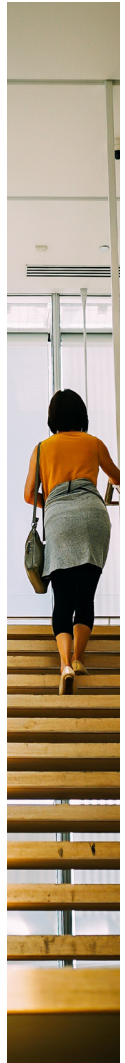
## Standard Healthy Meeting

- Encourage attendees to get up and move once every hour.
- Mention to attendees (through announcements or in written materials) that it is fine to move within the meeting space (standing, stretching); integrate exercise equipment if possible within the space
- Designate a standing space at the back of the room.
- When possible, allow for comfortable clothes/shoes to support physical activity during breaks.
- Periodically break up sitting time.
- For conferences or all-day meetings, support physical activity before, during, and after the work of the day.
- Provide adapted programming or alternative activities for those with physical disabilities.
- Identify someone to facilitate short physical activity breaks.

## Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- Try to choose meeting/conference locations where there are walkable destinations; provide walking/running maps.
- Provide a designated standing space with raised tables where attendees can comfortably take notes.
- Provide exercise stations in the hall or within the meeting room.
- Implement walking meetings when possible.



# Food Safety

## General Recommendations

- Promote clean hands and practice safe food handling practices to prevent foodborne illnesses.

## Standard Healthy Meeting

- Store hot food in the oven and cold food in the refrigerator until it is ready to be used.
- Ensure that food is kept at safe temperatures – hot food should be kept 140° F or above and cold food should be kept at 40° F or below.
- If you're outside, make sure to keep the food and utensils covered to keep bugs out and off.
- Throw out food that has been sitting out for more than two hours.

## Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- Maintain food temperatures while serving by using chafing dishes to keep food warm and serve cold dishes by submerging them in deep metal pans containing water and ice.
- When serving the food, put out small amounts and replenish when food becomes low to ensure food stays fresh. Store excess food in the oven or refrigerator to maintain appropriate holding temperatures.
- Have all event staff take a Safe Food Handling Class provided by the St. Mary's County Health Department or the University of Maryland Extension.



## Tobacco-Free

### General Recommendations

- Encourage a tobacco-free environment

### Standard Healthy Meeting

- Meetings should be held in smoke-free facilities.

### Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- A tobacco-free environment is provided at all times.
- Choose to host your conference in a location with a comprehensive smoke-free policy.



## Sustainability

### General Recommendation

- Prioritize sustainable practices when possible, by minimizing waste, encouraging recycling, and sourcing products from sustainable producers.

### Standard Healthy Meeting

- Reduce waste and packaging whenever possible.
- Consider appeal to meeting attendees, sustainability, and usefulness of conference giveaways.
- Have recycling bins available.
- Make handouts available online to reduce paper.

### Superior Healthy Meeting

Includes all Standard Healthy Meeting recommendations, plus the following:

- Conduct a zero-waste meeting or conference.
- Use locally-sourced and sustainably-produced food and giveaways when possible.



# Healthy Meeting FAQs

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the definition of healthy?**

Healthy is a relative term that depends on a wide range of factors. The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. It is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities.” When we reference healthy eating it means eating a variety of foods that give you the nutrients you need to maintain your health, feel good, and have energy. In this Toolkit, when we reference healthy foods we are basing it off of the current US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

### **Won't healthy meetings cost more?**

Some healthy foods may be more expensive, but by making portion sizes more reasonable, ordering less food, reducing waste, and rethinking whether snacks need to be provided at each break and meeting, you may end up saving money by reducing your overall food purchases.





## Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

### **Why shouldn't I serve sugar-sweetened beverages?**

Sugar-sweetened beverages are the single largest contributor of calories to the American diet and they contribute to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and tooth decay. By removing sugar-sweetened beverages and replacing them with water, flavored waters, seltzers, coffee, unsweetened iced tea, and other low- and no-calorie beverages, you make it easier for your employees, members, and partners to make a healthy choice while still leaving them satisfied with refreshing offerings.

### **Why should I ask the caterer, restaurant, or hotel to modify portions?**

Portion sizes in the U.S. have grown. Often restaurant meals provide two to three times more than a healthy portion. Plus, the proportions of foods from different food groups on most restaurant plates are inconsistent with expert dietary recommendations. By serving reasonable portions of healthier foods, your employees and members will feel satisfied without feeling the discomfort of overindulging. It also will help your employees and members to better balance their caloric intake and manage their weight.

### **Why should I remove or reduce desserts and pastries?**

Desserts and pastries add excess calories, added sugars, and fats, while adding few, if any, positive nutrients. Providing desserts and pastries causes people to eat extra calories they probably wouldn't have. By replacing desserts and pastries with fruit or another healthful food you help your employees, members, and partners make healthier choices instead of tempting them with extra calories.

### **Why should I reduce sodium at my meeting?**

The average American consumes approximately 4,000 mg of sodium per day. Yet, most Americans should consume no more than 2,300 mg per day, and people age 51 and older, those with high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, and African-Americans should consume no more than 1,500 mg per day. Serving foods with less sodium will help your employees and members moderate their sodium intake and spur hotels and caterers to think about how much sodium they add to their dishes.

### **Why should I incorporate 30 minutes of physical activity into my conference?**

Physical activity opportunities enhance the value of your meeting by increasing attendee concentration, productivity, and energy levels. Many people are not getting the recommended 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. By providing physical activity opportunities during your meeting or conference (this can be broken up in short physical activity breaks throughout the day), you help your employees and members reach the daily minimum recommendation. You also help to cultivate healthier social norms around exercise. Your meeting or conference could show attendees how easy it is to be physically active and show people new ways to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives.



# Take the Healthy Meeting Pledge

If you are committed to having healthy meetings, please take the healthy meeting pledge below (and also at <http://healthystmarys.com/healthymeeting>). Organizations, institutions, government agencies, or businesses that pledge to have healthy meetings will be recognized on the healthy meetings webpage.

## The Pledge:

The undersigned organizations, institutions, and companies have pledged to adopt healthy meeting practices. They recognize that having healthy meetings, conferences, and events helps to create an environment that supports employees and members in their efforts to eat well and be physically active.

