

Behavioral Design Strategies for Cafeterias, Micro Markets, and Similar Food Venues

The strategies presented here are based on the behavioral design standards in the [Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities](#). These standards are organized into six categories: Placement and Layout, Product Innovations and Defaults, Pricing and Promotion, Tableware, Information, and Organizational Policy.

The strategies suggested here are further organized into subcategories. Where available, visual examples are provided to illustrate the strategies.

Placement and Layout

Strategically place foods and beverages and design the layout of food service venues to foster selection of healthier foods and beverages.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Food Presentation	Organize products to influence selection—for example, by putting healthy items first among two items or in the middle of three items.	NEA*			
	Place healthier foods and beverages at or just below eye level, next to the cash register or checkout machine, at the front of cold and hot entree areas, or within easy reach of customers.	Micro Market			
	Place less healthy items in the middle rows of food or salad bars. Place healthier items in the rows along the edge.	Salad Bar			
	Place healthier items to the left of less healthy items.	NEA*			
	Place lower-priced healthy items next to higher-priced less healthy items.	Micro Market			
	Place only healthier items at eye level on shelves and in coolers and other food service or vending machines. Eye level for adults is 4 to 6 feet from the ground.	NEA*			
	Place all less healthy foods and beverages in the lowest shelving or vending positions.	Micro Market			
	Place fruit displays throughout the venue, including near the cash register or checkout machine.	Deli and Micro Market			
	Reduce the number and type of unhealthy options. Rotate the type of unhealthy options daily to reduce customers' perceptions of restriction.	Micro Market			
	Keep the majority of shelves, coolers, and containers full of healthier items.	Deli , Grill , Salad Bar , and Micro Market			
	Package healthier fresh items—such as sandwiches, sandwich wraps, fruits, and vegetables—in transparent containers.	Deli and Micro Market			

*NEA: No example available

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Food Presentation, <i>continued</i>	Make sure customers can see the package fronts of healthier items.	NEA*			
	Stock coffee stations with healthy breakfast and snack options.	Micro Market			
	Give visual diagrams (such as planograms) to food service staff and vendors to show them how to display healthier products.	NEA*			
Serving Areas and Equipment	Use equipment—such as coolers, shelving, and food or salad bars—that makes healthier foods visible, attractive, and easy to access.	Deli, Grill, Salad Bar, World Cuisine, and Micro Market			
	Use clear glass and colorful displays to enhance the visibility and appearance of healthier foods.	Grill and Salad Bar			
	Place only healthier items in highly visible display areas, such as those at the end of shelving systems.	Micro Market			
	Install drinking water stations that are visible, attractive, easily accessible, and able to fill water bottles.	Micro Market			
Flow Paths, Entrance, and Checkout	Provide a food service line that has only healthier options and a dedicated express checkout machine.	NEA*			
	Create flow paths that ensure that people walk by healthier choices.	NEA*			
	Place healthier items in the line of sight as customers enter the venue.	NEA*			
	Place only healthier items near cash registers or checkout machines.	NEA*			
	Place unhealthier items in less accessible areas, such as behind checkout counters. Do not place unhealthier items near checkout areas or entrances or within customer's line of sight.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Product Innovations and Defaults

Use product innovations and the inclusion of healthier options as default choices at decision points to encourage healthier choices.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Product Availability and Ratio	Reduce the variety of less healthy snacks.	NEA*			
	Bundle healthier options and give them appealing names, such as "Fit and Fresh Special."	NEA*			
	Offer healthier items in an easily accessible grab-and-go form.	Deli			
	Offer a variety of healthy and flavorful soups that are lower in sodium.	NEA*			
	Offer blended protein sources to increase nutrient quality and reduce cost—for example, burger patties made from a ground beef and vegetable blend (legumes or mushrooms).	NEA*			
	Offer healthy breakfast items, such as whole-grain products, yogurts, and fresh fruits.	NEA*			
	Offer precut fresh fruit in ready-to-eat containers.	Micro Market			
	Offer precut fresh vegetables with healthy dipping sauces in ready-to-eat containers.	Micro Market			
	If offering foods or meals that are easy to prepare (frozen, canned, or dried), offer options with plant-based protein, whole grains, and low sodium.	Micro Market			
	Stock water stations with healthy garnishes, like fresh citrus fruits, mint leaves, or cucumber slices.	NEA*			
	Remove salt shakers from tables.	Cafe Seating			

*NEA: No example available

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Portion Size	Reduce the portion size of less healthy entrees and sides.	NEA*			
	Offer smaller portion size options, such as half sandwiches, half-sized entrees, and smaller beverage containers.	Micro Market			
	Offer half-portion options for hot lunch meals and grab-and-go items, such as half sandwiches.	NEA*			
	For packaged foods and beverages, offer larger sizes of healthier items and smaller sizes of less healthy items.	NEA*			
	Limit the size of sugar-sweetened beverages to 12 ounces. Offer water and unsweetened beverages in larger containers.	Micro Market			
Defaults	Bundle meals with healthy sides, such as fruit or nonfried vegetables.	NEA*			
	Maximize healthy food options between lunch and dinner hours—for example, by keeping the salad bar open or providing grab-and-go, premade salads.	NEA*			
	Make healthier items default options across the menu—for example, by serving fruit or a salad as the default side instead of chips or fries.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Pricing and Promotion

Use price incentives and marketing strategies to highlight healthier food and beverage items.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Marketing	Feature meals that include only healthier items.	Deli			
	Introduce healthier products by providing samples for customers.	NEA*			
	Promote healthy options through social media and in-house communication methods, such as intranet sites, email messages, or worksite wellness newsletters.	NEA*			
Pricing and Economic Incentives	Promote healthier items through sales and pricing specials.	Micro Market			
	Offer healthier foods and beverages at a lower price than less healthy items.	Micro Market			
	Price bottled or canned water lower than sweetened beverages (caloric or noncaloric) of the same or similar size.	NEA*			
	Use revenue from increasing the price of less healthy items to reduce the price of healthy items to create either neutral or positive revenue.	NEA*			
	Create loyalty programs that incentivize the purchase of healthier options—for example, by offering a free item after multiple healthy purchases.	NEA*			
	Create a variety of standard healthy meal bundles that cost less than less healthy and a la carte meals—for example, a sandwich on whole wheat bread bundled with a fruit or vegetable snack and bottled water.	NEA*			
	Offer temporary price reductions on healthier items. Examples include “Fruit Fridays,” with fresh fruit 50% off after 2 PM or “Wrap Wednesdays,” with 50% off all wrap sandwiches.	NEA*			
	Offer discounts on healthier items that are left after primary meal hours and on items that are about to expire.	NEA*			
	Ask food distributors to provide rebates or buy-backs on new healthier products to reduce risk when introducing.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Tableware

Promote healthy portion sizes by optimizing the size of plates, bowls, glasses, other dishware, and serving ware.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Size and Shape	Use tongs and serving spoons that match appropriate serving sizes in all serving lines, including self-serve areas.	NEA*			
	Use smaller plates and bowls to reduce portion sizes.	NEA*			
	Reduce the size of plates and bowls used in buffets or self-serve venues.	NEA*			
	Use tall, narrow drinking glasses instead of short, wide ones to decrease amount consumed.	NEA*			
	Use larger serving ware for healthier items and smaller serving ware for less healthy items at food and salad bars.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Information

Use information, displays, decorations, and signage to highlight healthier choices.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Signage	Use color-coded signs and point-of-purchase displays to highlight healthier foods.	Deli and World Cuisine			
	Use signs that are easy to interpret—for example, by using colors, simple images, or few words.	Salad Bar			
	Use hanging signs to highlight healthier foods in areas with limited floor space.	NEA*			
	Use pictures of nature, healthy foods, physical activity, or fun activities to motivate healthy decision-making.	Cafe Seating			
	Use floor decals, such as green arrows, to lead customers to healthier items.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Menus and Labels	Highlight healthier items on menus or special boards with large, colorful text that stands out against background colors.	Deli			
	List healthier options at the beginning, end, or corners of menus instead of in the middle.	NEA*			
	On a vertical menu, present items with the lowest calories at the top of each product category.	NEA*			
	Advertise healthier food options near venue entrances.	NEA*			
	Create online preordering systems that put healthy items first.	NEA*			
	Give healthy options creative, appealing names.	NEA*			
	Use traffic light colors to encourage the selection of healthier options—for example, green = go, yellow = slow down and think, and red = stop and think.	NEA*			
	Label food products in ways that are relevant to customers' interests in their health, community, or environment—for example, "locally sourced" or "certified organic."	NEA*			
Food and Nutrition Literacy	Combine healthy labeling systems with a health communications campaign designed to resonate with customers.	NEA*			
	Conduct lunch and learn sessions for food service employees and customers.	NEA*			
	Offer taste tests to incentivize and encourage sales of healthy items.	NEA*			
	Offer healthier seasonal, regional, and culturally preferred foods.	NEA*			

*NEA: No example available

Organizational Policy

Adopt policies, practices, and programs that support a culture of health in your organization and encourage the use of food service guidelines and behavioral design standards in all onsite food venues.

Subcategory	Strategy	Visual Examples (Figures)	In Use	Will Implement	May Consider
Policies, Practices, and Programs	Feature information about pricing and promotional incentives for healthier foods and beverages in employee wellness materials.	NEA*			
	Establish food service policies that include behavioral design strategies in all current and future contracts and permits for all onsite food and beverage services.	NEA*			
	Establish healthy breakroom, meeting, and catering policies.	NEA*			
	Work with employee wellness programs to support food service policies, develop requests for proposals for vendors, select vendors, and conduct customer outreach for all onsite food and beverage services.	NEA*			
	Conduct customer surveys to identify food and dining preferences and increase customer buy-in before changes are made to food options.	NEA*			
Infrastructure Support	Offer space in or near workplace cafeterias for employee lunch and learn sessions.	NEA*			
	Obtain food service equipment that is designed to prepare healthier options, such as air fryers, panini grills, rotisseries with vegetable baskets, and steamers.	NEA*			
	Use refrigerated food service and vending machines to offer fresh foods, such as yogurt, fruits, vegetable snacks, and hummus.	Micro Market			
	Install filtered water stations throughout the facility that are visible, attractive, easily accessible, and able to fill water bottles.	Micro Market			
	Create and promote online preordering systems that have prompts to encourage healthy meal selection.	Grill			

*NEA: No example available