

Large study finds workplace foods contribute to unhealthy eating

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A study of 5,222 employees across the US found that the foods people get at work tend to contain high amounts of sodium and refined grains and very little whole grains and fruit. The results suggest that workplaces can play more of a role to help ensure access to and promote healthier food options.

"To our knowledge, this is the first national study to look at the [food](#) people get at work," said Stephen Onufrak, epidemiologist in the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Our results suggest that the foods people get from work do not align well with the recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans."

Onufrak will present results from the new research at the American Society for Nutrition annual meeting during Nutrition 2018, held June 9-12, 2018 in Boston.

The new study used data from the US Department of Agriculture Food Acquisition and Purchasing Survey (FoodAPS), a nationally representative household survey on food purchases and acquisitions during a seven-day study period. The researchers analyzed the food or beverages employees purchased at work from vending machines or cafeterias or that were obtained for free in common areas, at meetings or at worksite social events.

The analysis showed that nearly a quarter of study participants obtained

food from work at least once a week and that the average weekly calories obtained was almost 1,300. The food tended to be high in empty calories—those from solid fats and/or added sugars—with more than 70 percent of the calories coming from food that was obtained for free.

The researchers say that employers could help their employees eat better at [work](#) by using worksite wellness programs to promote healthy options that are also appealing. Employers could also ensure that foods in cafeterias or vending machines follow food service guidelines, which translate the US Dietary Guidelines for Americans into practical recommendations.

"Since we found that a lot of the foods obtained by employees were free, employers may also want to consider healthy meeting policies to encourage healthy food options at meetings and social events," said Onufrak.

The researchers are now conducting a similar research study using another dataset to examine foods specifically purchased from vending machines and cafeterias in the workplace.

"Worksite wellness programs have the potential to reach millions of working Americans and have been shown to be effective at changing health behaviors among employees, reducing [employee](#) absenteeism and reducing [health care costs](#)," said Onufrak. "We hope that the results of our research will help increase healthy food options at worksites in the US."

More information: Stephen Onufrak will present this research on Monday, June 11 from 8—3 p.m. in the Hynes Convention Center Auditorium (poster # 18) ([abstract](#)).

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