

Widely available food in US workplaces: Perk or hazard?

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Nearly a quarter of employed adults obtain foods and beverages at work at least once a week, according to a new study from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Foods obtained at work are often high in calories, refined grains, added sugars, and sodium.

Using data collected in 2012-13 from the large, nationally representative Food Acquisition and Purchasing Survey (FoodAPS), CDC investigators found that 23.4 percent of the 5,222 study participants obtained [food](#) at least once a week at work. The average weekly calories obtained was 1,292, and in general the foods consumed at work did not align well with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

"Employers can offer appealing and healthy options in cafeterias, vending machines, and at meetings and [social events](#)," said lead CDC investigator Stephen J. Onufrak, Ph.D., a researcher with CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, Atlanta, GA, USA. "One way to do this is by incorporating food service guidelines and healthy meeting policies into worksite wellness efforts."

Improving the nutritional quality of foods consumed at work can be a key component in worksite wellness efforts. Obesity and low dietary quality are important risk factors for chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer. These conditions represent seven of the top 10 leading causes of death in the US and treating them accounts for 84 percent of healthcare costs. In 2010, nearly three in 10 employed

adults had obesity. Employed adults with obesity reported lower consumption of fruits and vegetables and less frequent leisure time physical activity than normal weight adults.

With about 150 million working [adults](#) in the US, worksite wellness efforts to prevent chronic disease can reach a large portion of the American public. These programs have been shown to be effective at changing health behaviors among employees, reducing employee absenteeism, and reducing healthcare costs.

"Incorporating food service guidelines into wellness programs can help employers offer appealing and healthy options that give employees a choice," suggested Dr. Onufrak.

The foods analyzed in the study were either purchased from worksite vending machines or cafeterias, or obtained for free in common areas, during meetings, or at worksite social events. The study did not include foods that people brought into work from home for their own consumption or foods obtained at an off-site restaurant or retail outlet during [work](#) hours.

More information: *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2018.11.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.11.011)

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