

# Healthy Catering Ideas

## for meetings, functions and events

Serving healthy food and drinks is everyone's business.

No matter what the event, providing healthy and tasty food and drinks at functions, events (including fundraising), meetings and training sessions is a great way to contribute to the health and wellbeing of staff, clients, volunteers and visitors.

To help make healthy food and drink choices easier try these great ideas!

### Some tips before you begin:

- > To promote healthy eating, minimise waste and costs, provide only small or moderate serves per person.
- > Wherever possible make your menus healthier by :
  - Providing wholemeal or wholegrain options
  - Using low fat, low salt and reduced sugar options
  - Adding fresh fruits and vegetables/salads.
- > Ensure healthy choices look and taste great.
- > Use cooking methods that use the least amount of fat.
- > Use herbs and spices rather than fats and salt to enhance the flavour.
- > Use spreads thinly and serve condiments separately.
- > Always serve chilled water.
- > If providing alcohol ensure sensible and cautious use of alcohol to support recommended safe drinking guidelines (no more than 4 standard drinks on one occasion) and within regulations. Ensure a selection of non-alcoholic drinks are available –see *Drinks* section overleaf. (Learn more about the *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol* at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/ds10>; Information on Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) training is available at: [http://www.olgc.sa.gov.au/default.asp?page=liquor.General Information.Liquor Responsible Person 021203.htm&menu=liquor.](http://www.olgc.sa.gov.au/default.asp?page=liquor.General%20Information.Liquor%20Responsible%20Person%20021203.htm&menu=liquor))
- > Exclude unhealthy foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt, sugar and energy (kilojoules or calories) such as :
  - ✗ fried or deep-fried foods, fatty sausages, bacon or salami
  - ✗ pies, pasties, sausage rolls, quiches
  - ✗ butter, cream
  - ✗ croissants, donuts and sweet pastries
  - ✗ chips, crisps and other similar products
  - ✗ chocolate, lollies and confectionary products
  - ✗ iced or cream-filled biscuits, cream cakes
  - ✗ soft drinks and other sugary drinks including cordial

- > Ensure food is handled and served safely and hygienically. Keep hot food hot and cold food very cold to avoid food poisoning. For more information visit:  
<http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/food-index.htm>

## Suggestions and tips for healthy catering

### Drinks

- > Water – Tap water is the preferred option. Other suitable choices are sparkling, mineral and soda water. Avoid flavoured mineral water and soft drinks. *Tip:* serve chilled.
- > Fruit Juice – Unsweetened fruit juices (containing greater than 99 percent fruit juice).  
*Tip:* allow for small servings only.
- > Milk – Offer reduced-fat or skim milk in preference to full-fat milk.
- > Tea and Coffee – Options include regular tea, herbal tea, regular and decaffeinated coffee. Serve with reduced-fat milk. Provide sugar and artificial sweetener in small amounts

### Breakfast foods

- > Breakfast cereals – Wholegrain varieties such as wheat biscuits, cereal flakes, bran, untoasted mueslis or porridge. Serve with reduced-fat milk, low fat yoghurt, fresh or stewed fruit.
- > Bread and toast – Multigrain, wholemeal, rye, hi-fibre, or white bread, rolls, English muffins, crumpets, fruit bread, plain cornbread, crispbreads or rice cakes. Serve with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated margarine. *Tip:* always include a wholegrain bread variety and serve condiments and spreads separately and in small amounts.
- > Pancakes – Pancakes, crepes or pikelets made with low fat milk. Serve with fresh fruit and low fat yoghurt. *Tip:* serve spreads separately.
- > Fruit and juices – Fresh, stewed or canned in natural juice or artificially sweetened e.g. fresh fruit salad, grapefruit, kiwifruit, apple, oranges, pineapple, berries, mango in season. Serve as whole fruit, fruit salad or fruit pieces. Unsweetened fruit juices (containing greater than 99 percent fruit juice). Fruit smoothies made from fruit juice and crushed ice or made with reduced-fat milks/yoghurts. *Tip:* supply only small quantities of juice per person (one small glass).
- > Yoghurt – Plain or flavoured, low fat or no-fat varieties. *Tip:* serve in bulk or individual tubs.
- > Hot egg dishes – Scrambled, boiled, poached or omelette. Serve with toast, grilled vegetables, parsley and cracked pepper. *Tip:* cook with minimal fat using non-stick cookware.
- > Vegetables – Cooked vegetables and lentils. Grilled, char-grilled or baked tomato, spinach, mushrooms, corn or baked beans (salt-reduced). *Tip:* if baking, line trays with baking paper or lightly coat vegetables in polyunsaturated or mono-unsaturated oil spray.

### Platters, nibbles, finger foods and sandwich ideas

- > Dip platters – low fat vegetable-based salsas and relishes such as tomato, capsicum, bean or corn. Reduced-fat dips such as tzatziki, hummus, dhal and vegetable-based varieties including beetroot, capsicum, carrot, pumpkin and eggplant. Low fat cream cheese, ricotta or cottage cheese based dips. *Tip:* avoid aioli, sour cream and cream-based sauces.  
Serve with:
  - vegetables including carrot, celery, cucumber sticks, snow peas, broccoli, cauliflower pieces, mushrooms or tomato
  - bread sticks, French bread slices, toasted bread, mini toasts, crispbreads and crackers (use reduced-fat and reduced-salt varieties if available)

- roasted or grilled vegetables (drained of oil)
- plain, unsalted nuts (no nuts coated in candy or chocolate)
- dried fruits (no glacé or crystallized fruit).
- > Fruit platter – Fresh seasonal fruits, whole or in pieces. Fruit kebabs with sweet dipping sauces such as low fat vanilla yoghurt or berry puree.
- > Vegetable platter – Vegetable kebabs with savoury dipping sauces such as tomato salsa, mango chutney, chilli and ginger sauce. Stuffed vegetables such as stuffed tomatoes, mushrooms or zucchinis.
- > Salad platters – Garden, mixed, pasta, potato, rice or noodle, tabouleh, coleslaw or egg, lentil, couscous. Add lentils, red kidney beans and cannellini beans and roasted pumpkin, sweet potato and eggplant to salads. Serve with low-oil or no-oil salad dressings. Combine lean beef, chicken or fish to salads to produce a complete meal.

Suggestions include:

- Hokkein noodle, mushroom and cashew nut salad
- Avocado, green bean and chick pea salad
- Minted pea and potato salad with low fat mayonnaise
- Rocket salad with pear, spring onion and balsamic glaze
- Broccoli salad with snow peas, sesame seeds and ginger.

Meat and vegetable salad ideas include:

- Warm chicken salad with citrus fruits
- Grilled calamari with tossed garden salad and lime dressing
- Thai beef salad
- Lean lamb pieces with chick peas, coriander, olives, baby spinach and couscous.
- > Cheese platter – Include some low fat or reduced-fat options such as ricotta, fetta, or reduced-fat tasty cheese in the platter. Include fruit/salad on the platters.  
*Tip: serve cheese in small wedges in preference to large blocks.*
- > Sandwiches and rolls – Breads: Offer mostly wholemeal or multigrain breads and rolls. For variety use wraps, pita and Turkish bread, foccacia, lavash and bagels. Sandwiches can be offered toasted.  
*Spreads: use polyunsaturated or monounsaturated margarines. Look for reduced-salt and fat options and spread thinly.*

**Filling suggestions:**

- Meats: lean skinless chicken, lean ham off the bone, sliced roast beef or turkey breast. Avoid processed meats such as salami, chicken loaf, cabana, fritz, and bacon
- Fish: tuna or salmon canned in water in preference to brine or oil (drain oil before using) or smoked salmon
- Egg: boiled or curried
- Cheese: thinly sliced and reduced-fat varieties if available
- Salad and vegetables: avocado, bean sprouts, beetroot, lettuce, tomato, carrot, red onion, chives, cucumber, roasted eggplant, roasted capsicum or mushroom
- Condiments: chutney, pickles, mustard, capers, low fat mayonnaise, hummus, cranberry sauce or gherkin.



### **Other sandwich filling ideas:**

- Chicken, avocado, red onion and lettuce
- Ham, lettuce, tomato and mustard
- Roast beef with baby spinach and tomato chutney
- Tandoori chicken with spring onion and rocket
- Curried egg with lettuce and low fat mayonnaise
- Red salmon with alfalfa sprouts and low fat mayonnaise
- Char grilled vegetables with hummus
- Falafel, tomato and lettuce
- Hummus, tomato and cucumber.

*Tips: use oil spray when grilling or roasting vegetables and use condiments sparingly.*

### **Snacks and finger foods (also refer to 'Platters' section for additional ideas)**

- > Savoury –
  - Sushi or cold rolls, low fat vegetable frittata
  - Grilled or barbecued marinated chicken breast skewers
  - Lean beef meatballs with tomato salsa
  - Lentil patties or falafels (grilled or cooked in minimal oil)
  - Baked sweet potato wedges with a low fat dip (e.g.hummus, beetroot or eggplant dip)
  - Mini pizzas with minimal cheese and vegetable based toppings. (Commercial, frozen, homemade, muffin or pita bread based)
  - Toasted Turkish bread wedges with thin spread of pesto (low-oil variety) or hummus
  - Tomato and basil bruschetta (use minimal oil when preparing).

*Tips : serve mini versions or cut larger serves into smaller pieces and provide thin crust pizzas in preference to thick crust pizzas.*
- > Crepes, pancakes, pikelets, crackers – offer savoury crepes, pikelets, crackers or rice cakes including wholemeal varieties. Top with avocado, tomato and basil, smoked salmon and capers, asparagus and low fat mayonnaise, low fat cream cheese, low salt relishes or chutneys.
- > Muffins – offer un-iced plain or fruit (sultana, banana) or vegetable (grated carrot) muffins. Avoid muffins containing confectionery or choc bits. Halve large muffins or serve mini muffins.
- > Scones – Offer small sized plain, fruit or vegetable scones. Offer wholemeal scones if available and serve with low fat yoghurt or ricotta cheese and fruit purée. Serve spreads (such as jam and margarine) separately and avoid cream.
- > Savoury Biscuits – Offer low-salt varieties and wholegrain options when available. Allow small serves only.
- > Spreads – Polyunsaturated or mono-unsaturated varieties such as canola, sunflower, olive, soybean or peanut. Use spreads sparingly. Avoid butter, copha, palm and coconut oils. Serve spreads separately.
- > Sauces and condiments – Tomato, sweet chilli, BBQ, soy, chutney, mayonnaise, mustard, relishes or gravy. Serve separately with food where appropriate. Use salt-reduced, low fat and low sugar varieties. Use sparingly.
- > Salad dressing – Use low oil or no oil salad dressings.

## Hot dishes

- > Soups – Select vegetable or legume base soups. Choose clear based soups over creamy soups. Serve with fresh crusty bread, flat bread or toast. If using canned or packet soups, choose the salt-reduced varieties. *Tip:* use pepper, herbs or curry powder to enhance the flavour.
- > Vegetables – All vegetable types. Steam, microwave, grill, roast, barbecue or stir fry with minimal oil. Keep skin on vegetables if edible and possible. Try baked potato cooked in its skin, corn on the cob, roasted or char-grilled vegetables such as potato, sweet potato, red onion, pumpkin and parsnip. *Tip:* If baking, line trays with baking paper or lightly coat vegetables in polyunsaturated or mono-unsaturated oil spray.
- > Pasta – Spaghetti bolognese, lasagne, pasta-bakes. Select tomato or vegetable based sauces or white sauces made with low fat milk or ricotta when available. If serving cheese separately, use low fat cheese and limit the amount. Serve with a variety of salads. *Tips:* limit to entrée sized serves and avoid creamy based dishes or those with lots of cheese and processed meat.
- > Rice – Steamed is the healthiest option. Serve savoury, stir-fried, risotto containing lots of vegetables. Choose reduced-salt, low fat options and wholegrain varieties if available.
- > Noodles – Vermicelli, clear noodles or thin egg noodles. Stir fried noodle based dishes using reduced-salt varieties and flavourings. Combine with lean meats, poultry, fish, or tofu and a wide variety of vegetables. *Tip:* avoid packets of fried noodles.
- > Beef, veal, lamb, pork, chicken, poultry – Select lean cuts (topside, lean mince, rump, lean chops, breast meat or skinless drumsticks) with fat trimmed prior to cooking. Use low fat reduced-salt varieties of sausages or frankfurts. Choose low fat cooking methods such as grilling, barbecuing, roasting, steaming or stir-frying. No need to add fat when cooking. If marinating, choose reduced-salt and low fat ingredients. Serve with salads, baked potato, corn on the cob, roast vegetables, lentils and wholemeal bread. *Tips:* use non-stick cookware and avoid crumbed meat.
- > Fish – All fish types including shellfish. For canned varieties, choose those packed in spring water in preference to oil.
- > Barbecues – Meat choices include lean trimmed beef, lamb and pork steaks, chops, hamburgers made with lean meat, low fat sausages, whole roasts (for spits and covered barbecues), fillets, or kebabs, skinless chicken or turkey breast or drumsticks, kangaroo, fish fillets, calamari and prawns. Vegetarian options can include burgers made from lentils or chickpeas. Marinades, sauces and condiments should be reduced-salt varieties. Try natural herbs, spices, fruit juice and wine as marinade ingredients.

Some suggestions include:

- Lime and chilli chicken fillets
- Peppered beef and mushroom kebabs
- Soy and ginger salmon
- Citrus stuffed grilled trout
- Grilled chicken fajitas
- Chicken and dried apricot kebabs
- Barbecued fish kebabs with onion and peppers
- Indian spiced beef kebabs with low fat yoghurt dressing
- Barbecued pork medallions with apple or cranberry sauce
- Vegetable choices include corn, potato, sweet potato, pumpkin, onion, mushrooms, peppers, beans, eggplant and tomato.

- > Meat dishes – Stews, casseroles curries, savoury mince, meat balls, hamburgers (made from lean mince), burritos or tacos (meat can be replaced by legumes). Choose lean cuts of meat, poultry or fish and use reduced-salt sauces in dishes. Select dishes that include lots of vegetables and serve with extra vegetables or salad and steamed rice. *Tips:* if required, use a light spray of polyunsaturated or monounsaturated oil spray on the barbecue prior to cooking to prevent sticking. Always serve barbecued foods with a variety of salads or vegetables. Use salt-reduced sauces in dishes. Where possible serve sauces and dressings separately.

### ***Biscuits, cakes, slices, bars***

- > Sweet biscuits – Plain biscuits containing fruit, vegetables or nuts. Offer wholemeal options when available.  
*Tips: avoid coated, iced or filled biscuits and allow for small servings only.*
- > Cakes, slices, buns, muffins – Fruit, vegetable or nut based varieties without icing or fillings or added confectionery. Low fat and wholemeal varieties are preferable. Choose small slices of raisin, date, banana loaf, yeast bun, almond bread, low fat fruit based muffins (cut in half) or mini-muffins, or fruit based scones (halved). *Tips:* avoid sweet pastries, tarts, croissants and allow for small serves only.

### ***Desserts***

- > Custard, yoghurt, ice cream – Reduced-fat varieties of custards, ice cream or yoghurts including plain or fruit varieties. Avoid ice cream containing choc chip, toffee or confectionery.
- > Fruit – Fresh fruit salad, fresh or tinned fruit. Serve with reduced fat yoghurt/custard.
- > Puddings – Fruit based crumbles with oat based topping. Trifle made with sponge finger biscuits and low fat custard.
- > Pancake, crepes – Small crepes, pancakes or pikelets with low fat ice cream or yoghurt and fruit such as banana, berries, mangoes or kiwi fruit.

#### Acknowledgements:

1. Queensland Health's *A Better Choice-Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy* (2007)
2. *eat well be active* Morphett Vale, implemented by SA Health :Healthy Food Fundraising made easier: A Guide to healthier catering (2006)
3. Riverland Community Health Services: Healthy Food and Drink Choices for Staff and Visitors in SA Health Facilities Catering Guide (2010).

## For more information

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