



Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

www.ext.vt.edu

Virginia Cooperative Extension Healthy Meetings Initiative

Introduction

Virginia Cooperative Extension is on the front lines of helping our communities be the healthiest they can be. Having a healthy eating pattern and being active is key to good health, mood, and quality of life, as well as decreasing risk for chronic disease. Protecting the skin from sun damage when working and playing outdoors at all ages significantly reduces the risk of skin cancer.

As community health educators and representatives of VCE, we have the opportunity to set the example and to model a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. The Healthy Meetings Initiative invites you to join your colleagues in developing a culture of health within Virginia Cooperative Extension and among the clients that we serve.

How to Get Involved

1. Buy-In to the “Best Practice Healthy Lifestyle Curricula Across the Age Continuum for Obesity and Chronic Disease Reduction” Action Plan
2. Sign the Healthy Meeting Pledge found on the VCE website

[Healthy Meetings Pledge](#)

3. Read the healthy meeting tips to get ideas for how to make your programs and meetings an example of healthy living.
4. Use the checklist to document your healthy meetings, and what you did to model healthy behaviors.
5. Share your successes with pictures on the VCE facebook, twitter, and Instagram.
6. Use #VCEHealthyMeeting to spread the word.
7. Let us know what you did by answering the end of the year survey that will be distributed to all individuals and units that sign the pledge during the year.

Your success will be included in the FNH Program Impact statement.

Tips for Healthy Meetings

We have developed the following tips to highlight the healthy changes we can make in our food choices and meeting environments in order to best serve our clientele.

A variety of food and beverage options can be provided at meetings, and reminders to practice sun safety given during outdoor workshops and activities. The recommendations below are intended to provide options and encourage more nutritious food choices that are associated with improved health. Ask yourself the following questions to help guide you in providing healthier choices when planning your next meeting or training.

Is it necessary to offer food at this meeting?

- Is the meeting being held during a meal time?
- Will the meeting run long enough to warrant a snack or food?
- Avoiding unnecessary costs and calories can save money and improve health.

Are you offering water as one of your beverage choices?

- Water should always be offered if you are going to provide beverages.
- Water can be made more appealing by adding slices of fruit or vegetables such as lemon, lime, or cucumber.
- Save money by using large pitchers of ice and tap water.
- Avoid offering soda or other sugar added drinks at meetings.

Are fruits and vegetables included as part of your meal or snack?

- Fruits and vegetables make nutritious snacks and are quick and easy to prepare. Apples, oranges, grapes, carrots, sweet peppers and snap peas are just a few suggestions.
- Support your local farmer or produce stand by using local produce, whenever possible.
- Save money by purchasing fruits and vegetables that are in season! Look for local seasonal items at the grocery store or farmers' markets.
- Attempt to make foods more visually appealing

Are foods offered in appropriate portion sizes?

- Cut large bagels, muffins, or tortillas into halves or quarters.
- Use smaller cups and plates to promote appropriate portion sizes.
- <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/decrease-portion-size>
- <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/servingcard7.pdf>

Are whole grain choices available?

- Purchase whole grain foods such as breads, crackers, and bagels instead of those containing refined grains. The word "whole" wheat, (corn, oats, etc.) should be the first item on the ingredient list.
- Whole grains contain more nutrients and are more filling.
- Substitute whole wheat breads, bagels, wraps or crackers for refined grain versions.
- Here are some examples: whole wheat breads, bagels, tortillas, wraps, pita bread, or



Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

www.ext.vt.edu

crackers rather than the refined grain versions of these products.

Have you considered incorporating breaks that include voluntary or structured physical activity?

- Plan for some physical activity whenever possible, particularly when working with children.
- Incorporate movement as much as possible into your meeting's activities. Encourage standing and make standing tables (higher tables) available for those who prefer to stand.
- Try this website for some quick and easy activity ideas: www.gonoodle.com

Are you using safe food handling practices?

- Remember the four basic steps for safe food handling. 1) Clean: wash hands and surfaces often; 2) Separate: don't cross contaminate; 3) Chill: refrigerate promptly; 4) Cook: cook to proper temperatures.
- Minimize bare hand contact with foods. Use tongs, spatulas, single serving containers and toothpicks to serve food.
- Discard perishable foods that have been sitting out for 4 hours or longer; do not give them away or reserve for later eating.

Have you considered the dietary needs or preferences of those who might have food allergies or special dietary requests?

- Consider vegetarian options for popular dishes like chili or soups.
- Ask participants beforehand if they have any food restrictions or allergies.
- Consider labeling any foods containing allergens that are not clearly identified, such as: salads with eggs or a trail mix with nuts.
- Ninety percent of food allergic reactions are caused by these eight foods: milk, eggs, fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), crustacean shellfish (e.g. crab, lobster, shrimp), tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans), peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.

Have you tried making a recipe healthier by making ingredient substitutions? (eatsmart.ext.vt.edu)

- Use lower fat or fat-free milk and dairy products as opposed to whole fat choices.
- Flavor your dishes with spices, herbs, or citrus alternatives in place of salt/high sodium flavor additives.
- Substitute ingredients that are nutrient rich alternatives, such as rolled oats for breadcrumbs, or plain low-fat yogurt for mayonnaise.

Are foods that are lower in saturated fat, salt, and sugar available?

- Food options of lower saturated fat, salt and sugar versions are available. Examples are whole-grain pretzels and popcorn instead of chips, yogurt instead of ice cream, or fresh fruit instead of cakes and cookies.
- If you are going to offer foods higher in sugar, salt, and saturated fat, try to keep the portions in small serving dishes.
- Offer mixed dishes with plant food foundations such as stir-fries or salads.



SUN SAFETY

Do staff within your office whose work involves regular outdoor activities practice sun safety?

- Post the VCE/VDH Sun Safety poster in a prominent area of the office as a reminder to all staff and the public to practice sun safety when working or playing outdoors.
- If possible, have appropriate sun screen available in the office for use by staff who will be working outdoors.

Will activities for the meeting/workshop/camp be conducted outdoors?

- Outdoor meetings/workshops/summer camps are a good time to model appropriate sun safety behavior.
- Include a reminder to wear appropriate clothing and bring sun screen to protect the skin with the meeting registration confirmation.
- Remind participants to reapply sunscreen every 2 hours or after swimming, sweating and toweling off.
- Include the VCE/VDH Sun Safety publication with the meeting materials provided during the program.
- Have appropriate sunscreen on hand for individuals who forget to bring theirs.
- Give away the VCE/VDH Sun Safety poster to clients with employees for use in their facilities.

Publication Contributors:

Kathryn Strong, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, Arlington County; Rebecca Davis, Extension Agent, Family and Consumer Sciences, Clarke County; Tonya Price, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development Programs, Virginia Tech; Carlin Rafie, Assistant Professor, Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, Virginia Tech; Debra Jones, Extension Specialist, Virginia State University; and Elena Serrano, Professor, Human Nutrition Foods and Exercise, Family Nutrition Program Project Director, Virginia Tech