**Is the Food at Your Office Sabotaging Employee Health?**

Having unlimited access to free, unhealthy food five days a week is a big challenge for many employees. Donuts, soda, birthday cake, and bagels tempt employees to overindulge during the workday. After all, these foods are usually free and convenient! But employers should be mindful of the types of food and drinks they are supplying employees with because it can really impact employee health.

The 2018 [Employee Health and Wellness Checkup](https://www.roberthalf.com/blog/compensation-and-benefits/employee-health-and-wellness-checkup) by Robert Half shared some insight on what employees think of office food. This survey of 306 HR managers and 1,006 workers in the US found that workers’ listed their biggest obstacle in achieving their health and wellness goals as:

* Food at office celebrations – 30%
* Snacks brought in by coworkers – 22%
* Free meals – 10%
* Vending machines – 10%
* Office candy jar – 10%
* Happy hours/after-work drinks – 9%
* Business trips – 8%
* Bagel Mondays – 3%

These findings show us that unhealthy foods found in offices are one of the biggest challenges for full-time employees who are trying to live a healthier lifestyle. The survey also found that 44% of employees claim to eat healthier when they work from home. This could be because many employees are tempted by unhealthy choices throughout the workday. From leftover birthday cupcakes to regular pizza parties, it can be hard for employees to make smart nutritional choices.

Office cake culture is not a new concept by any means. Many employers and employees bring in unhealthy leftover dishes to share with colleagues, and many employers like to reward their employees with treats because it’s simple and cheap. While there’s nothing wrong with an occasional office treat (we can all use one every once in a while!), it can become hazardous when junk food is accessible to employees on a daily basis.

Along with being detrimental to employee health, unhealthy office food can lead to an unproductive workforce. Sugary, fatty junk food causes a sudden spike and drop of blood sugar – causing fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Studies have also linked junk food consumption with [mood changes](https://jamesclear.com/junk-food-science) and even a [higher risk of depression](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21835082).

We know that most of your employees enjoy free snacks or an office food day every once in a while – there’s no denying that. The trick is to make sure that healthy choices are available and that employees aren’t tempted to cheat on their healthy diets on a daily basis. Here are a few ways employers can combat the office cake culture and provide more nutritious options:

**Invest in a healthy vending machine.** Healthy vending machines are a huge [corporate wellness trend](https://www.forbes.com/sites/alankohll/2017/12/13/8-trends-that-will-impact-worksite-wellness-in-2018/#5fbaff0227ad) for 2018. While traditional vending machines are stocked with unhealthy choices – such as greasy chips, candy bars, and sugary granola bars – healthy vending machines are filled with healthier choices like almonds, fresh fruit, veggies, and hummus. Replacing your traditional vending machine with a healthy vending machine might help employees make better nutritional choices throughout the day.

**Focus on other perks.** Your company should have some other perks that employees enjoy other than free food. While it might be easy to pick up a batch of bagels on your way to work, try finding other [incentives](http://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/finding-the-right-wellness-incentives-to-motivate-your-employees) or perks to share with your employees. Instead of hosting a pizza party, take your team on a fun group outing like bowling, a scavenger hunt, or a [healthy picnic](http://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/bid/349870/How-to-Host-a-Healthy-Company-Picnic). You can also replace “donut Friday” with a jeans day or a raffle for a gift card. Creative, fun incentives will take the focus off of free junk food.

**Host healthy food days.** Food is an excellent way to bring employees together and encourage social connections. Which is why employers shouldn’t get rid of food days altogether. Rather, employers should focus on providing healthy options during catered lunches, office celebrations, and [potlucks](http://info.totalwellnesshealth.com/blog/host-a-healthy-office-potluck). Let employees know that you are planning a healthy food day, and encourage them to bring in some of their favorite healthy recipes. Be sure to lead by example by bringing in a fun and delicious healthy dish – it doesn’t always have to be a fruit or veggie platter!

**Practice moderation.** Your employees probably don’t need donuts *every* Friday morning. Instead of providing sweet treats on a weekly basis, consider bringing in treats for employees once a month. It makes treat day much more special, plus it’ll make it easier for your employees to enjoy their favorite treats while practicing moderation.

Unhealthy office snacks and meals can lead to fatigue, weight gain, and ultimately make fitness goals more challenging for employees. While there’s no reason to completely eliminate food days, potlucks, or the occasional treat, employers should strive to be more mindful about what types of foods are provided and start providing healthier choices.