

Healthier Vending Machines: An Employer Guide

Vending machines: notorious for sugary drinks, salty snacks and fat laden chocolate bars. It doesn't have to be this way. **Small changes** such as simple product substitutions can make a **big difference**.



5.5

MILLION

Japan has the highest number of vending machines per capita, with 5,582,200 vending machines, which equates to about one machine for every twenty-three people.¹



Healthy vending machines

Vending machines have, literally, been around for centuries. Admittedly, the first ‘vending machine’ didn’t resemble the ones we know so well today.

Unlike the typical high energy (kilojoule), saturated fat, sugar and salt options usually available, the ‘vending machine’ allegedly dispensed ‘holy water’. It was invented by a first-century engineer and mathematician whose machine delivered water through a valve onto a pan once a coin was deposited.

Fast forward more than twenty centuries and the vending machine has become part of the ‘workplace furniture’ so to speak. For many workplaces, vending machines provide a quick and easy solution to those seeking a small or substantial snack - whatever the time of day.

The range of food and drinks available are usually high in energy (kilojoules), saturated fat, sugar and salt. Your usual suspects include soft drinks, potato chips, chocolate and confectionery.

The bad news is that these types of food, eaten regularly, are associated with weight gain and you guessed it, the development of chronic disease - think heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

The good news is, that there are many healthier alternatives to typical vending machine fare. The extra good news is that this presents an opportunity for workplaces to readily influence the food and drink supply of workers. By including healthier options, the workplace is providing an environment where healthy eating is supported.

Of course, workers do have a right to choose what they consume, but the provision of healthier options will increase, rather than limit, the range of foods available.

The introduction of healthier options can be anything from gradual to swift, depending on the nature of your workplace, the vending machine contract, the relationship with your supplier and your workers’ willingness to trial new products.

Getting started: working with your vending machine supplier/s



Before you get stuck into overhauling your workplace machine/s, there are a couple of initial steps to work through.

01

Vending machine

Who currently liaises with the vending machine supplier?

They will hopefully have the contact details of the company.

Alternatively, this information is often listed on a sticker on the machine itself. Your workplace may in fact have vending machines with more than one supplier.

02

Vending machine contract

A copy of the current contract would be helpful at this point.

With some contracts, you may not be able to negotiate the contents and/or the product placement of the machine/s. If this is the case, it is still worth talking with your supplier to let them know that you intend to negotiate with them when the contract is up for renewal.

03

With the key details sussed, it's time to get talking with your supplier

You will need to understand the capacity and constraints of your current workplace vending machine/s:

- What type/s of vending machine does your workplace use? Drink? Snack? Combination? Refrigerated?
- What is the current capacity of the machine/s?
- How many product selections can be displayed?
- Are the tray spirals able to be manually manipulated to hold different sized products?
- Can the number of trays (rows) in the machine be altered?
- Or is the workplace able to manually fill the machine/s?
- What type of signage is on the machine/s? Can this be changed?

Having a conversation with your supplier helps to establish important information about your workplace's vending machine/s, and the opportunities that may exist to modify the food and drink offered at your workplace.



Moving forward: healthier vending machine ideas

With contact initiated and key information ascertained, it's now time to start negotiating about how to improve the food and drinks on offer in the vending machine/s at your workplace.

The following list is by no means exhaustive and discussions with your supplier may in fact elicit many other ideas. We encourage you to share these ideas with us at hchf@education.wa.edu.au.

Opt for smaller packet sizes

- The easiest strategy to start with is modifying the existing vending machine range by introducing smaller packet sizes
- This will enable you to fit more choices on one tray, allowing greater choice for workers, albeit in smaller sizes
- This strategy allows for items that are typically Red, e.g. potato chips and chocolate bars, to be offered in smaller, more appropriate sizes. This helps to send a clear message about recommended portion sizes of Red items
- This strategy will also reduce the number of times the supplier will need to do a 'service run' because smaller packages will help to increase the overall capacity of the machine/s.

Dedicate a 'tray' in the machine to healthier options

- Instead of overhauling the whole machine, insert a tray of healthier options
- This allows some new, healthier items to be introduced, while it also leaves many of the existing products available
- For a workplace, resistant to change, this may be an effective starting point as introducing a 'healthier options' tray helps to cater for the varying needs and wants at a workplace without alienating specific groups
- The other option is to make sure there is always a 'healthier' version of an 'unhealthy' item. For example, for every full sugar soft drink, include a diet option as well.



Negotiate a 'trial period' for new products

- Establishing a trial period to encourage workers to try the new products available may help sales
- For suppliers, this may encourage them to be more open to trialling different products. If a supplier is unsure about a product it presents a potentially costly exercise and wasted product. It is worth talking to your supplier and suggesting that the new products are only bought in small quantities initially, not wholesale amounts.

Price the healthier options competitively

- If you want to encourage the trial and sale of new items, they need to be priced competitively compared to less healthy items
- You might want to talk with your supplier about subsidising healthier products with profits from less healthy products, thereby making the healthier products a cheaper or at least, a more reasonably priced option.

Promote the healthier items

- With new, healthier products on offer, it's important that workers know about them and are encouraged to try them
- You may wish to talk to your supplier about labelling the products with a sticker saying 'new' or 'healthy option'
- Another option is to ask permission to attach a sign to your vending machine/s indicating the inclusion of new items
- If you are introducing a vending machine, which is entirely comprised of healthier items, consider placing it in a location with high visibility and foot traffic
- If you have shift workers at your workplace, you could encourage consumption by providing 'tokens' for food for night shift workers
- Encourage trial of the healthier vending machine by only allowing the tokens to be able to be used in these specific machines.

Selecting healthier food and drink items

The WA School Canteen Association (WASCA) has developed a database of healthier food and drink items, specific for vending machines.

This database uses a 'traffic light' system to categorise food and drinks into Green, Amber or Red categories based on the following definitions:



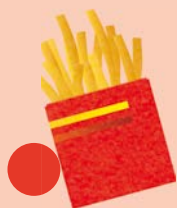
Green items:

Greater nutrient value and are low in saturated fat, added sugar and salt. Examples include fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low fat dairy products, wholegrains eggs and legumes.



Amber items:

Some nutritional value but contain moderate amounts of saturated fat, added sugar and/or salt and can contribute to excess energy intake. Examples include low-sugar drinks, full-fat dairy products and white varieties of breads and cereals.



Red items:

Limited nutritional value, are energy dense - high in saturated fat, sugar and salt. Examples include sweet biscuits, confectionery, sugar sweetened drinks and deep fried foods.

Underpinning these definitions is a set of nutrient criteria, which help to more clearly differentiate Green, Amber and Red choices across and within food groups. More information on these food and drink categories can be found in the [Healthier Food and Drink Guide](#).

As the database is specific for vending machines, there are some key details that have been included to make the supply of healthier food and drink options easier, such as:

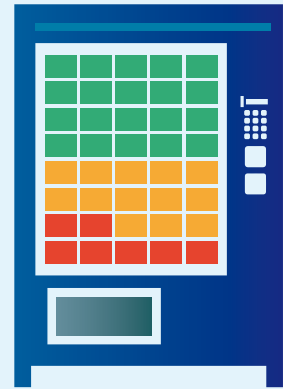
- Manufacturer name
- Product name
- Product size
- Image
- Dimensions
- Refrigeration requirements
- Other comments

For more information, visit the vending machine database on the WASCA website www.waschoolcanteens.org.au

Vending machine display and promotion

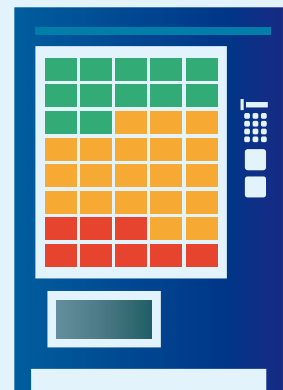
While short term promotion of new products is important, it's also necessary to consider the overall display of food and drink items.

- If you have opted for a 'tray' of healthier items, ask your supplier to place these at eye level. After all, 'eye level is buy level'
- If you are undertaking some more comprehensive changes to the machine/s, consider the following food and drink selection and display ratio
- With this proportion of products, the display of your vending machine might resemble something like this:



However, this is a significant change from traditional vending machine set ups, so a more feasible option might be:

- With these proportions, the display of your vending machine might look like this:



Note that changes to the layout and display of food and drink in some machines may be limited by the machine itself and/or contractual agreements. However, it's still worth talking with your supplier and letting them know that you intend to negotiate the display and promotional arrangements of the machine/s with them when the contract is up for renewal.

Testing the waters

With discussions with your supplier initiated, some healthier food and drink products selected and display guidelines considered, it is now time to test the water with your workers.



For more information:

☎: (08) 9264 4999

☎: (08) 9264 4981

✉: hchf@education.wa.edu.au

🌐: www.healthierworkplacewa.com.au

