

Healthy Foods in Recreation Facilities

It just makes sense





Purpose

There are many health benefits to eating plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grains, and reducing fat, salt and sugar. Recreational facilities are places where people gather for sports and recreation and where they should also have access to healthy foods.

The goal of this kit is to provide awareness, education and resources to encourage a greater availability of healthy food choices in New Brunswick's recreational facilities. Recreational facilities may include arenas, swimming pools, youth centres, community centres, curling rinks, bowling alleys, skate parks and many other venues.

All of these facilities have a direct influence on New Brunswickers' food choices. Depending on what foods you offer in your concessions, **you can help make the healthy choice the easy choice** for New Brunswick athletes and their families.

Acknowledgements

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The following people have been key in creating this resource:

HEPAC Working Group on Healthy Food Choices in Community Recreational Facilities:

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How to use this kit

There are several different parts of this resource kit which can help you in different ways.

The main part of the kit is this **booklet**. It is designed for your own learning, but also contains useful information that can help you to explain why changes are important, as well as outlining ways to make changes while operating, and how you can make changes and still operate a profitable food concession in your facility. The information in this kit can also be used to help with planning special events, community barbecues, summer festivals, etc.

There are several **fact-sheets** that you can photocopy and hand out to partners, both within your facility and within the broader community. For example:

- **Fundraising** – This could be helpful to groups or teams who want to fundraise without promoting unhealthy foods.
- **Canteen options** – This can be used to give you some ideas for your own concession stands, to help volunteer groups within your facility, or to share with interested groups in the community who are interested in getting started in this work within their own buildings.
- **Eat to Perform** and **Beverages for Sport & Health** – this information would be appreciated by parents, coaches and athletes. These handouts encourage them to make healthy choices both at home, and also within your facility.



Finally, there is a **poster** which you can put up around your facility. Parents often spend long periods in hallways and lobbies waiting for their children to finish their activities.

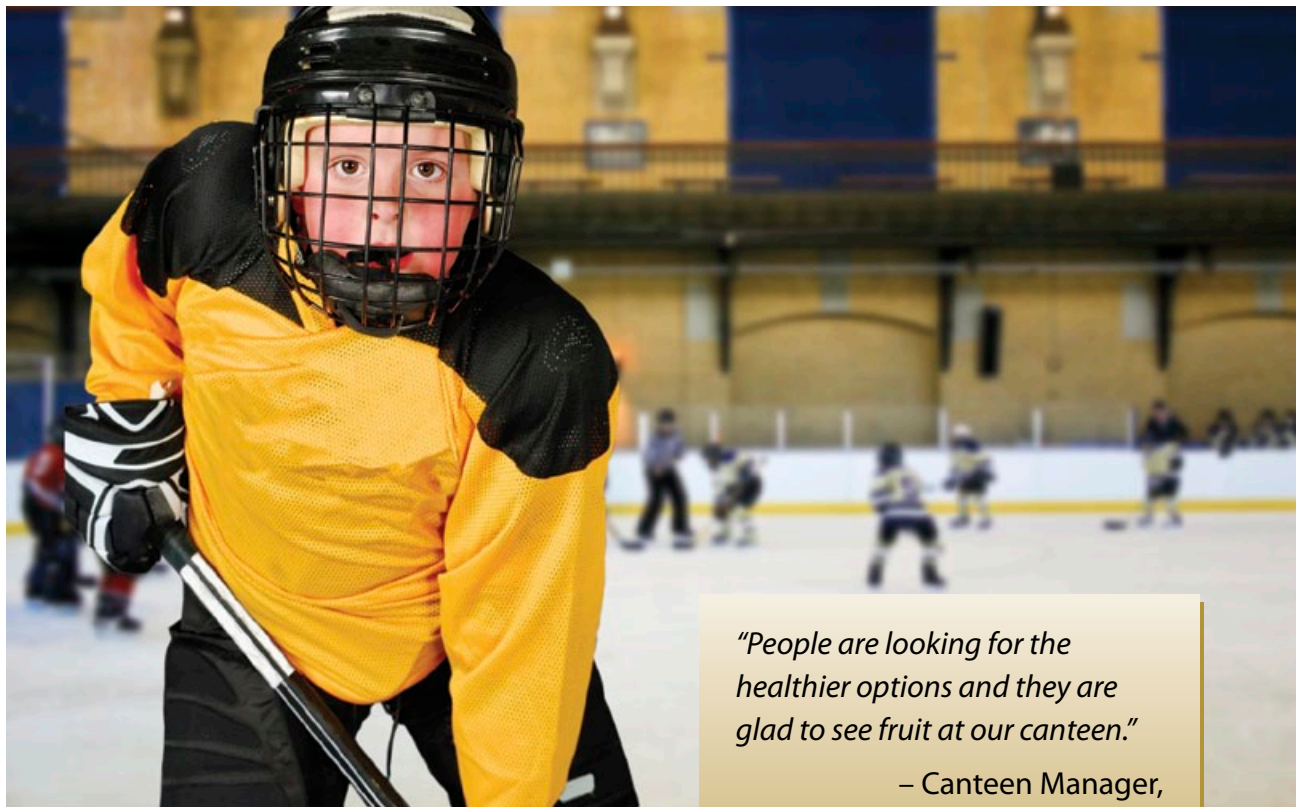
These resources can help to educate customers about healthy choices and to encourage them to purchase healthier foods while they are at your facility.

We hope that you find this information helpful in providing healthy food choices to your customers. If you need further information, start with a visit to www.hepac.ca or consult the resources available from other provinces that are mentioned throughout this kit.

Why Rec Facilities?

New Brunswickers, like all Canadians, are becoming more aware of the foods they eat, and want foods that taste good and are good for them¹. It is essential that we help New Brunswickers to make healthier choices by improving availability of healthy foods wherever they live, learn, work and play:

- **Where they live...** Families are starting to make changes at home. Six out of ten Canadians (59%) report having changed their eating habits in the past year¹.
- **Where they learn...** Since 2005, healthier foods have been more available in New Brunswick schools, because of Policy 711 (Healthier Food and Nutrition in New Brunswick Schools)².
- **Where they work...** Workplaces, hospitals and other public and private institutions are also starting to look at the foods they sell and serve.
- **Where they play...** Recreational facilities are often the cornerstone of many communities³. They are home to some of the largest populations of youth outside the school setting. They are also important gathering places for parents and older adults. Recreational facilities already play a vital role in keeping New Brunswickers healthy by providing safe, public spaces for physical activity. When healthy food options are also available at these facilities, it can have a strong impact on the health of the community.



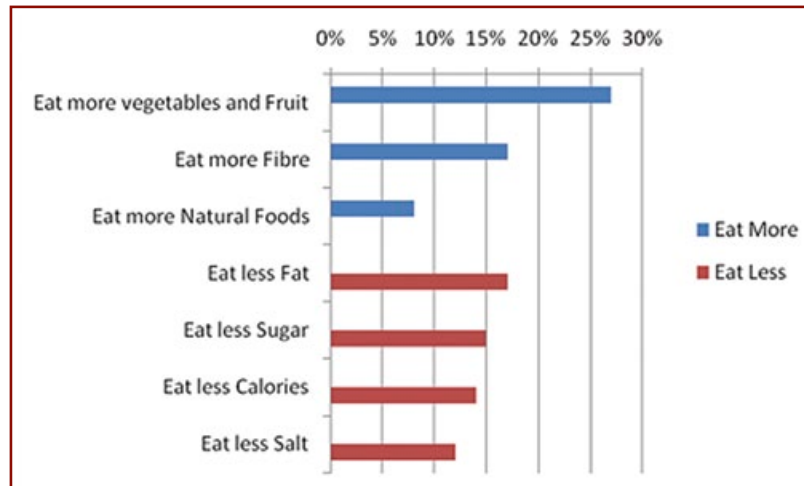
"People are looking for the healthier options and they are glad to see fruit at our canteen."

– Canteen Manager,
Willie O'Ree Arena, Fredericton

Trends Create New Markets

People today are paying more attention to what they are eating. While **taste** plays a role in the foods Canadians choose (98% think it is somewhat important and 76% think it is very important¹), it is not the only factor in their decision making. **Cost** is also somewhat or very important for about 45% of Canadians¹. And Canadians also look at the **nutritional quality** of the food they buy. In 2008, the most important nutritional factors for Canadians were: low trans fat content (80%), made with whole grains (78%), low in sugar (72%) and low in salt or sodium (71%)¹.

Figure 1: Changes Canadians were trying to make in their health in 2008¹



As shown in Figure 1, many Canadians are trying to make changes in their health, and recreational facilities are impacted by these trends. Two surveys among customers at arenas in Ontario found:

- 90% of respondents wished they had healthy food options to buy at recreation facilities⁴;
- 34% of respondents did not buy any food while they were at recreational facilities⁵;
- 47% of respondents brought food from home⁵, most of which (86%) was food that would be considered healthier choices⁵.

A 2005 survey of 34 New Brunswick recreation facilities⁶ showed that most facilities have some kind of food concession: 82% had vending machines and 91% had canteens. The foods most commonly sold at NB recreation facilities in that survey included **hot dogs, chocolate bars, sweetened beverages, potato chips, and candy**.

At New Brunswick's "Big Splash" Youth Conference in 2006, participants were surveyed to ask what kinds of foods they would like to buy at recreation facilities. The foods that they said they were most likely to buy were **fruit smoothies, fruit with yogurt dip, milk, bagels, sandwiches/wraps, vegetable sticks & dip**.



Other research supports the information obtained from the New Brunswick youth. A similar survey in Ontario in 2007 found the top five foods that people wished they could buy at arenas included **fresh fruit, vegetables, sandwiches, cheese & crackers, and low fat muffins**⁴.

Meeting Consumer Demand

These statistics indicate that there is a strong and growing market that can be tapped by offering healthy foods. Every recreational facility has a wide variety of customers who walk through the doors every day. In order to meet customers' expectations and cater to their preferences, it helps to be able to offer them a variety of choices – including healthy ones. There is room for catering to the foods that have been traditionally available at these facilities while at the same time having people purchase healthier foods. Read on for information about how you can help promote healthy eating, while taking advantage of this lucrative new market.

What's in it for you?

There are many potential benefits to be gained by selling healthy foods, including improved image, and a broader customer base:

- Tap into a new market of potential customers – people who are currently using your facility but are not purchasing food.
- Build new partnerships with coaches, community members, parents and young athletes.
- Become recognized as a leader in promoting health and wellness.
- Attract positive media attention.
- Contribute to community awareness about the importance of healthy eating, and to an improvement in overall health within your community.
- Contribute to increased wellness of your own facility staff, which can lead to healthier, more energetic staff and volunteers.

There are big benefits for the community as a whole. As we know, overweight and obesity rates are continuing to rise. In 2007, 27% of New Brunswick youth and 56% of adults were overweight or obese⁷. We also know that the eating habits of New Brunswickers need to improve. For example, only 6/10 children⁸ and 3/10 youth⁹ eat vegetables and fruit 5 times per day, while research has demonstrated that children and adolescents who eat fruit and vegetables 5 or more times a day are substantially less likely to be overweight or obese than are those whose fruit and vegetable consumption is less frequent¹⁰. Having healthier food options available and accessible throughout the community, in other words **making the healthy choice the easy choice**, can contribute to improved health of our whole population. And healthy people are more likely to use recreational facilities!



Revenue Potential with Healthy Foods



Have you been reluctant to introduce healthier food options because they are too expensive, too wasteful, or too labour intensive? The good news is that food suppliers are starting to recognize the market potential of healthier foods, and they are starting to provide healthier options that are competitive with less healthy items in terms of ease of storage & preparation, minimal equipment requirements, and reasonable costs.

A New Brunswick case study shows that offering healthy food choices in vending machines and canteens can make sense financially! A research project undertaken in New Brunswick in 2007 compared the potential mark-up on healthy items, compared to similar foods which were higher in fat, salt and sugar, and lower in nutrients.

The research examined actual purchase prices from New Brunswick food wholesalers and compared them to typical retail prices for those food items in vending machines, canteens and restaurants in the province.

Within these case studies, the difference between the wholesale and retail prices of these healthier items were very competitive, and sometimes even better than the less healthy options. For example:

- **A baked potato with salsa**, selling for \$2.00, cost \$0.19 wholesale; a similar portion of **French Fries**, selling for \$2.00, cost 30¢ wholesale.
- **A bagel with peanut butter**, selling for \$2.00, cost \$0.51 wholesale; a **hot-dog and bun** had the same selling price and wholesale cost.
- **A cereal bar** selling for \$1.25, cost \$0.42 at wholesale; whereas a **chocolate bar** selling for \$1.25 cost \$0.59 wholesale.

The case studies examined in this research project indicated that many healthy food choices actually offered greater margins between wholesale and retail prices than similar options which were less healthy. More examples are offered in the next pages.

Milk vending machines

With milk vending machines, people can buy milk even when the canteen is closed. Ask your local vending company about installing a milk vending machine in your recreation facility.

Healthy Choices for your Facility

Far from being boring, the four food groups offer many food choices that are delicious, nutritious and popular with customers. Here are some suggestions for healthier food options, showing sample wholesale and retail costs from the 2007 NB study.

Vegetables and Fruits

	Sale price*	Wholesale cost*	Difference*
Apple	\$1.00	\$0.30	\$0.70
Banana	\$1.00	\$0.25	\$0.75
Baked Potato	\$1.50	\$0.03	\$1.47
Canned Fruit	\$1.00	\$0.65	\$0.35
Veggie Sticks	\$2.50	\$0.70	\$1.80

Grain Products

	Sale price*	Wholesale cost*	Difference*
Bagel (2.3 oz)	\$1.00	\$0.30	\$0.70
Bagel (4.0 oz)	\$1.50	\$0.36	\$1.14
Cereal Bar	\$1.25	\$0.45	\$0.80
Pretzels	\$1.25	\$0.45	\$0.80

Milk & Alternatives

	Sale price*	Wholesale cost*	Difference*
Cheese strings	\$1.00	\$0.34	\$0.66
2% milk (500 mL)	\$2.00	\$0.96	\$1.04
Chocolate milk (500 mL)	\$2.00	\$1.06	\$0.94
Yogurt (100g)	\$0.75	\$0.41	\$0.34
Yogurt tube	\$0.75	\$0.32	\$0.43
Yogurt drink	\$1.75	\$0.79	\$0.96

Meat & Alternatives

	Sale price*	Wholesale cost*	Difference*
Hummus & pita	\$2.50	\$1.28	\$1.22
Trail Mix	\$1.00	\$0.43	\$0.57

**as observed in 2007, NB research project*

Recipes & Meal Ideas

Here are a few ideas for foods to try. Retail and wholesale prices from the 2007 NB Survey are included in the chart below.

Perfect Parfaits

Berry and yogurt parfaits are popular, delicious and easy to make. They can be made ahead of time and stored in the fridge or made to order.

To make: mix in a plastic cup or bowl, 3/4 cup low fat vanilla yogurt, 1/2 cup frozen mixed berries.

Bagels

Many wholesalers sell frozen bagels in bulk boxes or individually wrapped. Smaller bagels can even fit in vending machines. Served toasted, warmed, or cold, with a variety of different toppings, bagels are sure to be a hit!

Chili

Chili is a favourite for many New Brunswickers and it represents an easy option for any canteen, big or small. Canned, frozen or homemade chilli can be put in a slow cooker and be ready to serve all day long!

Other ideas...

- Cheese and crackers
- Baked potato with chilli, salsa or low-fat sour cream
- Spaghetti with meat sauce
- Vegetable soup with a whole wheat bun
- Quesadillas

	Sale price*	Wholesale cost*	Difference*
Mixed Berry Parfait	\$2.25	\$1.44	\$0.81
Bagel with low fat cream cheese	\$1.75	\$0.66	\$1.09
Chili	\$2.50	\$0.68	\$1.82
Meal ideas (above)	\$1.00 – \$3.00	\$0.50 – \$1.70	\$0.50 – \$2.30

*as observed in 2007, NB research project

There are many more healthy meal and snack ideas. If you are just getting started you can talk to other recreation facilities to see what they have done.

And check out the following resources...

- *The fact sheet that comes with this kit called "Healthy Alternatives for Canteens"*
- *"Making the Move to Healthy Choices" toolkit from Manitoba. The main toolkit has many food suggestions and meal ideas on pages 7-17. Their newsletters also feature recipe ideas and success stories from their rec facilities. These resources are all available at <http://healthylife.cimnet.ca>*

"The hours we are open dictated what we could do and couldn't do. We sold what made a profit. We kept with the lean hamburgers and sold bottled water. I got the vending machine guy to bring in a milk machine and to add peanuts and smart chips to the vending."

– Anna Dean, Rogersville Arena

Taking Steps Towards Offering Nutritious Choices

[adapted from "Making the Move to Healthy Choices", Brandon Manitoba, 2008, <http://healthylife.cimnet.ca>]

Changing the type of foods offered in your concession, snack bar, vending machine or canteen can be more successful with a planned approach. Be flexible and remember, sometimes timing is everything.

Strength in Partnerships

Step 1 – Gather your team

Identifying and involving key people can make any change more successful. Seek out the support and involvement of your board members to help them understand the benefits of including healthier foods in your facility (i.e. increased community support, positive image, etc. See pages 3 – 5). You also should engage your food service employees or volunteers to help them prepare for possible changes to their roles, and proactively address any concerns that they may have.

There are others in your community who can help you with your initiative! They may be able to provide information on healthy eating, help you develop marketing strategies, or help you spread the word about your new initiatives. Potential partners in your community may include municipal sports and recreation committees, municipal council, families/facility users, facility staff, coaches, athletes, service clubs, health professionals, media and local businesses. Partners get involved with this kind of project when they can clearly see what they have to contribute, and how they might benefit through their involvement. It can be a win-win relationship for everyone. Connecting with the community will help to contribute to your success.

Step 2 – Where are you now?

Before you start making decisions about what changes you can make, it is important to take a look at your current situation. All these factors will have an impact on what changes you can make, how quickly you can start, etc.

- What foods are being offered now?
- What type of food service do you have?
- What type of kitchen equipment do you have available?
- What space do you have for food preparation?
- What type of refrigeration do you have?
- Are your food services contracted?
- Do you own your own vending machines?
- Who do you have on hand that can help?
- What else do you need to consider?



Step 3 – Where do you want to go?

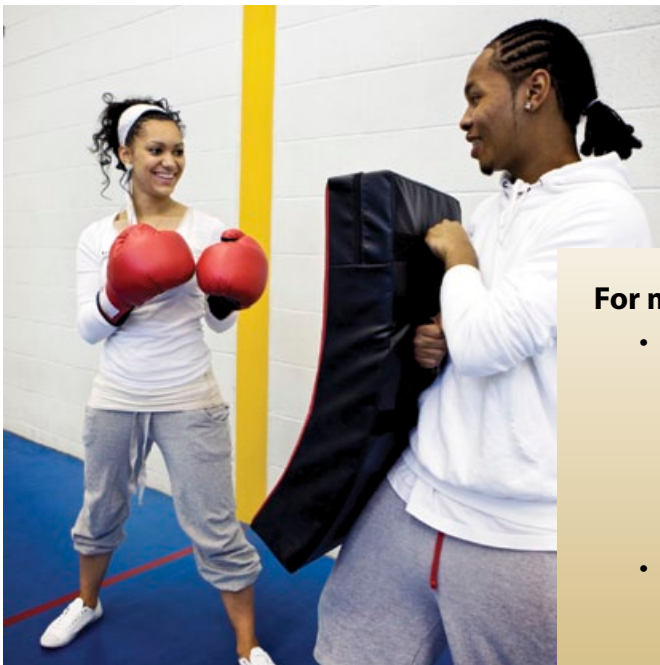
Often, the most successful plans involve making both long range goals and laying out the smaller, short-term objectives. It is great to develop a far-reaching vision, but it is just as important to identify what small, simple changes you need to make along the way. Looking at what you identified in Step 2, how do you plan to move forward? Decide what will work best and provide you with the most success.

- What are our priorities?
- Which will be the easiest changes to make? Why?
- Which will be the hardest changes to make? Why?
- Which changes can we do now, in six months, in one year?

Step 4 – How are you doing?

Making any change requires a continuous cycle of reviewing feedback, sharing successes, and making improvements to initiatives that may not have gone as anticipated.

- Report back to your board and others on a regular basis.
- Keep records regarding sales and marketing strategies.
- Consult with coaches, managers and parent committees so they understand and can promote the new healthy choices.
- Talk to people to educate them about the importance of offering healthy foods in recreation environments.



For more ideas on how to do this work...

- *The Healthy Eating Physical Activity Coalition of New Brunswick (HEPAC) can help you with additional resources or put you in touch with people who can help.*
www.hepac.ca
- *The BC toolkit for healthy eating in Rec. Facilities (“Stay Active Eat Healthy”) is available at:*
www.stayactiveeathealthy.ca/managers/modular_toolkit.html

Marketing & Promotion

Attracting sales for any new product requires a marketing & promotion strategy. Here are some suggestions to increase consumer uptake of new products:

Taste test!

Offer free samples to introduce new healthy foods to customers. This will give you a feel for the popularity of a new product, while creating excitement and drawing attention to the new items. If you offer 2 or 3 possible new foods at once, you can ask customers to fill out a very short survey to show which food they would be most likely to purchase.

Re-vamp your canteen layout:

Learn lessons about marketing from the experts. Consider colour, flavour, texture, and temperature when planning your menu and preparing healthy food. If food looks good and tastes great, people will buy it! The presentation of food is important to customers¹¹. Encourage impulse purchases of healthier choices by:

- placing healthy options at eye level and within easy reach;
- reducing visibility of less-healthy items;
- using attractive packaging and product displays.

Use signage and other promotional opportunities

Research indicates that sales of healthy foods in recreational facilities are higher immediately after launches and promotional events³. Using a range of marketing strategies throughout the season will help to keep interest high. Here are some suggestions:

- Use banners and colourful signs in different locations in the facility, not just in the canteen. The Bulletin Board Poster included in this kit can be part of your promotional campaign.
- Announce new items over the PA during events.
- Create a marketing theme for your nutritious food items such as the “fit lunch”, “power items”, or “I choose” options¹¹.
- Use points, draws or frequent buyer cards to encourage customers to purchase healthy foods and meals. Have prizes donated by partner organizations (fitness equipment, water bottles, sports bags, healthy food items, etc.).
- List healthy choices at the top of menu boards, or identify them with a special symbol.
- Use bright, attractive colours, large fonts, and pictures to illustrate healthy options.

Food Safety

Any items needing preparation or on-site packaging require the facility to be licensed. Consult your local Public Health Inspection office for more information.





Sources

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