

m-NEAT ACTION PLAN TOOLKIT: CONVENIENCE STORE OPERATIONS

BACKGROUND:

Convenience stores are a source of foods and beverages for many military personnel either living on or off the military installation, especially, when the commissary or dining facility is closed. Thus, convenience stores offer an excellent opportunity to help fuel our warfighters with optimal performance-based foods and beverages. However, convenience stores are often a source of less-than-healthy products. Many options are high in calories, fat, and added sugars, and are low in nutrients. Examples are candy, soft drinks, chips, cookies, and alcoholic beverages. Offering nutrient dense foods, such as fresh produce, lower fat sandwiches, yogurt, and reduced sugar beverages can help individuals make better choices.

NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR CONVENIENCE STORES

The m-NEAT defines healthier food and beverages using guidelines developed by nutrition experts from reputable federal agencies^{1, 2} It also requires that a certain percentage of items meet these criteria.

Food or Beverage Item	m-NEAT Healthy Convenience Store Criteria
Snacks/Chips	Snack Items: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Fat ≤35% calories per serving (excludes nuts and seeds without added fats or oils) • Trans Fat ≤0.5 grams per serving (excludes reduced-fat cheese) • Sugar ≤35% by weight of total sugars (excludes fruits, vegetables, milk) • Sodium ≤230 mg per serving (snack items) and ≤480 mg per serving (meal items) • Calories ≤200 calories per package (snack items) or ≤500 calories or less (entree meal) • Chips: Fat-Free: 0 grams fat/serving • Reduced-Fat: <3 gm fat/1 oz. serving
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh Fruit is available and meets acceptability standards • Canned fruit packed in water or natural juice
Yogurt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fat Free or Low-fat Yogurt* • ≥20% Daily Value (DV) for calcium/serving • 10% DV for vitamin D/serving • ≥5 gm protein/serving • “Live and Active Cultures” seal <p><i>*Yogurt with no added sweeteners or yogurt labeled as reduced or less sugar according to FDA labeling standards</i></p>
Cheese	Lower fat cheeses are available (part skim, reduced-fat)
Cereal/Cereal Bars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <10 gm sugar • ≥16 gm whole-grain/serving or listed as 1st ingredient • ≥3 gm fiber/serving

Sandwiches & Wraps	<p>≥25% Sandwiches/Wraps are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% Whole-grain/whole wheat bread • ≤30% kcals fat • ≤10% calories saturated fat
Frozen Dinners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Least 1 Reduced-Fat (≤9gm fat/ 8-11 oz. pkg.) is available • ≤480 mg sodium/serving • At least 1 Entrée is ≤500 calories
Beverages	<p>Milk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1%, Skim, Non-Fat milk <p>Fruit Juice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% Fruit Juice <p>Soda/Carbonated Drinks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 50% of beverages with ≤40 kcals beverages are available Energy drinks are <10% beverages in stock

Operation: BeFit! Healthy Convenience Store Program

The Army/Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) has developed a point-of-sale nutrition education and labeling program which has been implemented in a number of their Express Stores. Nutrition criteria align closely with federal guidelines and m-NEAT criteria (Attachment 1: Exchange Express Nutrient Standards: Operation: BeFit!).

Operation: BeFit! Logo



GETTING STARTED

A Sample m-NEAT Healthy Convenience Store Action Plan (Attachment 2) is provided to help you begin. Garnering the most support for healthy food and beverages on your installation will require collaboration with others, especially your Installation Commander and Convenience Store Manager. Items on the action plan can be developed and assigned to key stakeholders and progress monitored as a part of your Installation Health Promotion Working Group meetings.

Define and develop a coalition of key stakeholders. The first step is to develop a team of key stakeholders to include, most importantly, the installation's Convenience

Store Manager. Other key team members may include the Health Promotion Manager, dietitian and Public Health Officer. Include Convenience Store customers to ensure their favorite products are maintained. Determine if there are particular individuals or groups that oppose changes in healthier convenience store options that need to be included as part of your discussion/team.

Meet with your CONVENIENCE STORE MANAGER to determine how/where food and beverage products are acquired. Determine whether a nutrition labeling program is in place, and if so, the existing nutrition criteria and labeling practices.

Increasing Percentage of Healthy Items While Ensuring Customer Satisfaction and Profitability. One of the most common challenges to increasing healthy choices is a perception by managers that the items will not sell and will hurt profits.³ This is understandable. Research regarding healthier vending practices show positive trends in customer acceptance and profitability.^{4,5,6} However, less is known regarding marketing healthier foods within the concession or convenience store setting. Starting out at perhaps, 15% of items (or current baseline) and gradually increasing the percentage of healthy choices may help consumer acceptance. The size of the store is another factor to consider when determining the number of healthy items to stock. Larger stores may have the capacity to stock more options whereas a small store, such as a gas station, may have limited space for such items. **In order to optimize consumer purchases and product sales of healthy items:**

- Place healthy items on top shelves
- Adjust product mix based on consumer feedback
- Offer taste tests
- Include comment cards at the register

Pricing Strategies. One possible strategy to improve consumer selection of healthier items is to lower the cost of healthier items, increase the price of less healthy items, or a combination of both. A number of studies show that this strategy is effective and that vending profits are not negatively affected.^{5,7} Current DoD policy, however, may limit the ability to adjust pricing to the degree necessary to observe a significant effect on consumer purchase behavior. Alternately, you might note whether the healthier snacks are priced **higher** than traditional versions of snack. Discuss possible pricing strategies with your Convenience Store Manager.

Promoting Healthy Products. Work with your Convenience Store Manager to help promote marketing of healthier items:

- Implement signage. One study found that signs showing the number of calories (250) in a regular bottle of soda or fruit drink reduced the probability of adolescents buying sugary beverages by approximately 40% in comparison to providing no calorie information.⁸
- Conduct a product sampling event. If the manager and vendor are willing, the health promoter could partner with a vendor to present information related to the health benefits of their product.
- Operation: BeFit! provides the Army/Air Force Express Store Manager with marketing and implementation materials to include monthly end-cap promotional displays (Attachment 3)

Buying and Storing Fresh Produce

Fruit and vegetables are powerhouses for a variety of nutrients for health. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourage individuals to eat a rainbow in order to get a variety of antioxidants. One study shows that when stores carry a greater variety of fruits and vegetables, customers tend to buy them.⁹ Many types of pre-cut fruit and vegetables are currently available. However, if selections do not look appealing, customers will not select or eat it. Use the following buying and storage tips below to ensure quality and safety of fresh produce.

<p>Buying Tips For Fresh Produce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase produce that is not bruised or damaged. • When selecting fresh cut produce, such as individual apple slices or carrots, choose only those items that are refrigerated or surrounded by ice. • Bag fresh fruits and vegetables separately from meat, poultry and seafood products.
<p>Storing Tips for Fresh Bananas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too Green? Try putting them in a paper bag with an apple overnight to speed up the ripening process. • Too Ripe? Store the fruit in the refrigerator. The skin may darken but the banana will be just right for several days.
<p>To Maintain Quality of Fresh Produce</p>

- Refrigerate **pre-cut or peeled produce and perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like apples, fresh fruit cups, and lettuce)** to maintain both quality and safety.
- Keep your refrigerator set at 40° F or below. Use a fridge thermometer to check! If you're not sure whether an item should be refrigerated to maintain quality, ask a produce manager.

Exchange Express Nutrient Standards: Operation: BeFit!

Attachment 1:

Food Category	Standard
Entrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 500 calories or less • ≤10% calories from saturated fat • ≤ 480 mg sodium for one item • ≤ 600 mg sodium per meal
Grains (rice, bread, pasta)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain (first ingredient) • ≥ 2 grams of fiber per serving
Cereal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain (first ingredient) • ≤ 35% sugar by weight • ≥ 3 grams of fiber per serving • ≤ 230 mg sodium per serving
Dairy & Milk Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fat free or 1% milk (both flavored and unflavored) • Fat free or low-fat yogurt* • Fat free or low-fat cottage cheese • Fortified soy, almond or rice milk with < 12 g sugar per serving
Fruits & Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole fruit • Fruit canned in 100% juice • 100% fruit juice • Fresh or frozen vegetables with no added fat or sauces • ≤ 230 mg sodium • ≤ 480 mg sodium for mixed dishes containing vegetables
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • < 290 mg sodium per serving for canned or frozen tuna, seafood, salmon • < 480 mg sodium per serving for canned meat
Nuts & Seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ≤ 140 mg sodium per serving • No added fat (chocolate, oils)
Snacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ≤ 200 calories per serving • ≤ 10% calories from saturated fat • ≤ 35% sugar by weight* • ≤ 230 mg sodium per serving <p><i>*Excludes f/v without added caloric sweeteners (i.e. raisins)</i></p>

**All items must contain 0 g Trans Fat*

**If an item like trail mix contains added sugar/oil, it will be analyzed under the snack category*

ATTACHMENT 2: Sample m-NEAT Healthy Convenience Store Action Plan Checklist

This sample checklist is intended to help you get started and can also be included in your Installation Health Promotion Working Group (HPWG) meeting minutes. Suggested Action Items and Points of Contact can be modified as needed according to the needs of the installation and resources available. The FIT PICK™ Implementation Guide (FPIG) also contains valuable guidance and tools.

Suggested Action Items	Suggested Point of Contact	Status/Considerations	Expected Completion Date
Define and Develop a List of Key Stakeholders	Installation HPWG Officer		
Assess Current Convenience Store Status (Use most current m-NEAT, meet with Convenience Store Manager)	Installation HPWG Officer	Address the following: a. Current m-NEAT Convenience Store Score/ Areas of Improvement b. Convenience Store Manager Concerns	
Conduct Healthy Vending Survey See Sample Convenience Store Customer Survey (Attachment 4)-Could also use electronic survey or conduct a focus group)	Installation HPWG Officer		
Conduct Taste Test (If Vendor/Convenience Store Managers are willing)			
Develop Grand Launch			

<p>Items to include:</p> <p>Stickers/Labeling</p> <p>Plan-o-grams</p> <p>Advertise presence of healthier snacks</p>	<p>Installation HPWG Officer Oversight</p> <p>Convenience Store Manager</p> <p>Convenience Store Manager</p>	<p>Choose a pilot site (if applicable) first before full implementation to assess compliance with standards, acceptance, and sales.</p>	
<p>Monitoring</p>	<p>Convenience Store Manager</p>	<p>Ensure healthy items are stocked and priced appropriately.</p>	
<p>Marketing Strategies</p>	<p>Installation HPWG/ Convenience Store Manager</p>		
<p>Develop ongoing education /employee training</p>	<p>Convenience Store Manager</p>		
<p>Collect, Track & Report Evaluation Measures</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. m-NEAT Convenience Store scores 2. Customer Survey (Attachment 4) <p>Sales Reports comparing healthy vs. traditional products</p>	<p>Installation HPWG Officer/ Convenience Store Manager</p>	<p>Document lessons learned</p>	

ATTACHMENT 4: Convenience Store Healthy Food & Beverage Item Survey (to be completed on-site)

1. Please tell us about yourself by indicating your rank/grade.

- E1-E4 E5-6 E7-E9 01-03 04-06 07 & Above
- Gov't Civil Service: Indicate Grade: ____ Gov't Contractor
- Family Member/Retired Other: _____

2. How many times per day have you purchased a food/beverage item in the Convenience Store in the past week?

- Less than once
- 1-2 times
- 3-4 times
- 5-6 times
- 7 or more times per week

3. If you purchased no food or beverage items today, skip to question 4. If you purchased food or beverage items, please indicate all items that you purchased:

- Fruit
- Sodas/Carbonated Beverages
- Energy Drinks
- Fruit or Vegetable Juice
- Milk
- Candy
- Snacks/Chips/Nuts
- Cereal or Cereal Bars
- Cookies, Pastry, Donuts
- Bread, Bagels, Muffins
- Yogurt
- Frozen Dinners

- Grab-N-Go Entrees (Salads, Sandwiches, Hotdogs, Pizza, Burritos)
- Other (list):

When making a decision about what food or snack to purchase at the Convenience Store, how important is:

(MARK ONE BOX FOR EACH ITEM)

		Not at all important		Somewhat important		Very important
4	Trying a food/snack item I've never had before:					
5	How the food/snack item tastes:					
6	Food/Snack item price:					
7	Number of calories in a food/snack:					
8	Amount of fat in a food/snack item:					
9	Amount of carbohydrates in a food/snack item:					
10	How "healthy" a food/snack item is:					
11	Watching my weight or health concerns:					
12	Value for my money:					
13	Buying my "usual" snack:					
14	How hungry I am:					

17. I am satisfied with the number of healthy items at this Convenience Store for each of the following:

Food/Snack/Beverage Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Fruit					
Sodas/Carbonated Beverages/Energy Drinks					
Milk					
Fruit or Vegetable Juice					
Cereal, Oatmeal, Cereal Bars					
Yogurt					
Frozen Dinners					
Grab-N-Go Items (Salads, Sandwiches)					
Bread, Bagels, Muffins					

18. If there were a greater number or variety of healthy food and snack food choices, I would buy them from the Convenience Store more often than I currently do.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

19. Please list the types of healthier products you would like to see:

20. I am aware of the Operation: BeFit! labeling program at the AAFES Express Stores.

(Delete or modify question, as applicable to the store where the survey is being administered)

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

21. I noticed the following Operation: BeFit! marketing materials at the AAFES Express Stores (Please check all that apply):

(Delete or modify question, as applicable to store where survey is being administered)

- Posters
- End-Cap Displays featuring healthier products
- Shelf Labels & Clings
- I did not notice these items

SURVEY COMPLETE
THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSES!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & REFERENCES

Operation Be Fit contains a comprehensive implementation toolkit to include implementation guide, healthy product list, marketing tools. Operation Be Fit Express Sign Kit is available through AAFES and shows various types of signage to include posters, stickers, and clings).

Healthy Corner Stores Network: Healthy Corner Stores Network supports efforts to increase the availability and sales of healthy, affordable foods through small-scale stores in underserved communities. www.healthycornerstores.org

Philadelphia's Healthy Corner Store Initiative 2010-2012 Report: Outlines Philadelphia's efforts to increase healthy foods in area convenience stores. Includes marketing ideas, signage, etc.
http://foodfitphilly.org/FOODFITPHILLY/assets/File/HCSI_Y2report_FINAL%202012.pdf

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health and Sustainable Food Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations.
<http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/guidelines/food-service-guidelines.htm>.

Alliance for a Healthier Generation is a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation. www.healthiergeneration.org

¹ HHS/GSA Healthy and Sustainable Food Guidelines (Federal Concessions and Vending Operations):

http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/pbs/Guidelines_for_Federal_Concessions_and_Vending_Operations.pdf

² Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations: Q & A for HHS Employees: <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/pdf/QA-foro-Employees.pdf>.

³ Healthy Vending Toolkit: Guide for Federal Healthy Vending Options.

⁴ Gorton D, Carter J., Cvjetan B, Ni Mhurchu C. Healthier Vending Machines in Workplaces: Both Possible and Effective. *N A Med J.* 2010 Mar 19; 123 (1311): 43-52.

⁵ French S.A., Jeffery RW., Story M., Breitlow K.K., Baxter J.S., Hannan P., Snyder M.P. Pricing and Promotion Effects on Low-Fat Vending Snack Purchases: the CHIPS Study.

⁶ Kimmons J., Wood M., Villarante J.C., Lederer A. Adopting Healthy and Sustainable Food Service Guidelines: Emerging Evidence from Implementation at the United States Federal Government, New York City, Los Angeles County, and Kaiser Permanente. *American Society for Nutrition. Adv. Nutr.* 3: 746-748, 2012; doi:10.3945/1n.112.002642.

⁷ French S.A., Hannan P.J., Harnack L.J., Mitchell N.R., Toomey T.L., Gerlach A. J. *Occup Environ Med* 2010 Jan;52 Suppl 1:S29-33.

⁸ Blich S.N., Herring B.J., Flagg D.D.I., Gary-Webb T.L. Reduction in purchases of sugar-sweetened beverages among low-income Black adolescents after exposure to caloric information. *Am J Public Health.* 2012 Feb;102(2):329-35. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300350. Epub 2011 Dec 15

⁹ Martin, K.S., Haves, E., Boyle, K.E., Matthews G., Schilling, E.A., Harel O., Ferris, A.M. If you stock it, will they buy it? Healthy food availability and customer purchasing behavior within corner stores in Hartford, CT, USA. *Public Health Nutrition* doi:10.1017/S1368980011003387. Nov 2011.