Adding a Sodium-Reduction Component to the Energize Your Meetings Program

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Context: Energize Your Meetings (EYM) is a program created by the Washington State Department of Health designed to provide voluntary guidelines for caterers and meeting-planning staff to provide healthy food options and to encourage physical activity at worksite meetings. The program provides guidelines based on a 5-star rating system, with 5-star choices being the most healthy. This project addresses adding a sodium component to the EYM guidelines.

Results:

5-Star Guidelines ★★★★★
Provide at least one low-sodium option
- Sodium recommendations for a full meal: no more than 600 mg sodium
- Homemade soups, salad dressing, and dips
- Roasted or grilled meats and fish instead of deli, salted, cured, or smoked meats and fish
- Lower sodium cheese in 1-ounce servings (see Recommended Foods and Beverages)
- Breads with 200 mg sodium or less per slice; crackers and other snack foods with less than 150 mg sodium per serving
- When serving sandwiches, avoid other high-sodium foods

Implications: Excessive sodium consumption contributes to heart disease, hypertension, renal disease, stroke, and other disorders, costing the US health care system more than $180 million annually.* The need for community, public health, and industry interventions in addition to simply interventions at the individual level is receiving increasing attention. By conducting this project, the Department of Health hopes to take a step toward reduction of this economic and disease burden and to:

- Stay in step with the sodium reduction emphasis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New York City Health Department, the American Heart Association, and the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Educate caterers, worksites, and administrative staff on healthy food options
- Serve as a model for culture change with respect to meetings, worksite wellness, catered events, and procurement policy
- If Washington state’s buying power is sufficiently robust to change menus statewide, create broader economic influence favoring the procurement and distribution of lower-sodium foods and food products


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Methods:

- Research current literature on sodium-reduction efforts, sodium content of common foods, and the newly revised Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Solicit input from caterers and administrative staff by creating and administering an interview tool
- Create sodium guidelines with the input of stakeholders and integrate into the 5-star rating system framework
- Revise EYM meal suggestions and food and beverage list to include sodium guidelines
- Add a key to the recommended food and beverage list explaining the FDA’s definitions of “no sodium,” “very low sodium,” “low sodium,” and “reduced sodium”
- Create a double-sided education document targeted toward caterers and administrative staff