

Bay County Health Department

Guide to Healthy Vending

This guide makes some general recommendations about types of food that are best for healthy vending, but beware; depending on the manufacturer the nutritional content of the same item (i.e. granola bars) can differ significantly from one product to the next. For this reason check the nutritional information on every food item, do not assume one product is “healthy” just because similar items have passed the test.

The Test

If you keep the calories from fat less than 35% of the total calories per serving and the sugar by weight less than 30% of the serving size then you’ve probably got a “healthy” snack. Again, make sure to check each item you’re considering; assume nothing.

Some Snack Suggestions

Low-fat granola bars, breakfast bars or other types of snack bars. Animal crackers, snack mix, trail mix (without chocolate), dehydrated fruit (try and get brands with no added sugar), peanuts, almonds, pistachios, cashews or other nuts. Nuts are high in fat, but it is the “good fat”, so they are exempt from the 35% fat test and they are a good source of protein and vitamins and minerals as well. Low-fat popcorn, pretzels, graham crackers, canned fruit (in water, not syrup), soy crisps and rice crisps (avoid the varieties with MSG) and a pickle (yes, vendors can get individually wrapped pickles for vending). If you also vend skim milk in your drink machine, you can add healthy breakfast cereals or even packets of instant oatmeal to your snack machine. Then again the cereals can just as easily be eaten as a dry snack and the oatmeal can be made with water. Beware of the sugar content in some of the flavored oatmeals and check the cereals also.

Drink Options

Substitute diet and caffeine-free diet sodas for full sugar sodas. Stock 100% fruit juice or better still 100% juice fortified with calcium and also 100% vegetable juice (V8). Skim milk or 1% low-fat milk (avoid 2%, it is **NOT** low-fat), low-fat soy milk or rice milk for the lactose intolerant and you can use flavored milks (chocolate, strawberry, vanilla) as long as they are skim or 1% and have less than 150 cal/8oz. There is at least one variety of latte that is made with low-fat milk, but be careful once again you need to stay less than 150 cal/8oz and most of the latte drinks are high in sugar. Water is usually the most popular item in a drink machine and whatever you do stay away from full-sugar sports drinks. The sugar in sports drinks is the same as the sugar in sodas; don’t be fooled by the advertising; unless you are training at the collegiate or professional level you do not need the additional sugar calories or the “electrolytes” (just a fancy word for salt and potassium). You can go with “fitness water” versions of sports drinks which are low or no calorie and typically fortified with calcium.