

Negotiating our way through the pandemic, the link between food and wellbeing has become even more apparent. In her role as registered nutritionist supporting the food team at NHS Supply Chain, Danielle Smith explains how making changes through food can encourage wellbeing amongst NHS staff.



Harnessing the trend: a focus on food and wellbeing

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, there will undoubtedly be a huge focus on our wellbeing. Paying close attention to how we care for ourselves, and those around us, will be a key focus in the year ahead, and food can play a big role. Supporting hospital staff with readily available healthy and nutritious food options will be very important.

The extra attention paid to hospital food and wellbeing via the publication of the 'Independent Review of NHS Hospital Food 2020', the imminent publication of new hospital food standards, and a select committee enquiry looking into the effectiveness of Government Buying Standards for Food (GBSF) means now is the perfect time to make changes to promote positive wellbeing through food at your NHS trust. >





Potato and sugar snap pea salad with parmesan, from the Root Kitchen range of NHS Supply Chain recipes released in April.

24/7 access to nutritious food

One way for this to be achieved for the 1.4 million NHS staff in the UK, as identified in last year's 'Independent Review of NHS Hospital Food 2020', is providing 24-hour access to healthy food in hospital settings. For anyone working long hours at an NHS trust when hospital restaurants or even nearby shops are closed, having access to nutritious food that can sustain them, and sometimes provide a bit of added joy, is vital.

This may seem like a mountain to climb depending on your catering set-up, but there are some easy ways to achieve this. There are several new and innovative vending machine products now available, from world-first hot soup servers and self-service meal-deal machines, to robotic customisable salad machines, all housed at the appropriate temperatures thanks to market-leading, built-in heating or refrigeration systems.

Low salt, saturated fat and sugar options

Public Health England's (PHE) set of criteria that constitute 'nutritionally balanced menus' is based on the percentage of your recommended daily intake per serving (salt, fat, sugars) for staff and visitors in NHS Trusts. These criteria form part of the Hospital Food Standards and are mandatory for the NHS.

NHS Supply Chain uses these criteria to shape sourcing documents to procure a suitable

range of products that include healthy eating options for staff and visitors. We have also used these criteria as a basis when producing our six ranges of recipes, which we're releasing from November 2020 to November 2021. This is where the criteria can be used directly to analyse the dishes produced and we have set ourselves a target that at least 75 per cent of all of these recipes are 600kcal or less, at least 75 per cent meet national calorie and salt reduction targets, and all recipes include nutritional analysis. By developing the recipes to suit healthy eating, and having many more options, a catering team has an easier task of incorporating healthy eating into menus.

Other ways to easily add healthy eating options to your staff food offer is to look for CQUIN-compliant products. Items such as sandwiches and snacks sold in your retail outlet can be switched for products that comply and are lower in salt, saturated fats, and sugar (the negative nutrients).

How we can help

Overall, there's a lot that can be done to support wellbeing among your staff through great food. It is possible to offer healthy and nutritious options to those working at any time of day, and it's encouraging to see there are now more options than ever to support progress on this.

To find out more about how the NHS Supply Chain: Food team can support you with your catering offer, speak to your local food account manager. Contact details can be found at www.supplychain.nhs.uk/categories/food

"In our NHS, as many as one in four nursing staff is obese – perhaps unsurprising when we consider the pressures on their time and the difficulties many face to eat healthily at work."

Quote from the Independent Review of NHS Hospital Food 2020.

Catering teams can work with manufacturers to choose the sort of items you would like on your vending machine menu but further information about NHS Supply Chain's Hot Beverages and Vending Solutions Framework can be found at www.supplychain.nhs.uk/product-information/contract-launch-brief/hot-beverages-and-vending-solutions

Alternatively, speak to your NHSSC Food account manager to discuss your requirements and tailor your options.