

# BENEFITS OF EATING LESS RED MEAT A GUIDE FOR WELLNESS PROGRAM DIRECTORS

Three primary goals of employee wellness programs are to promote health, encourage high rates of employee engagement and participation, and realize cost savings for the employer.<sup>1</sup> Wellness program directors can achieve these goals by having their on-site dining operations serve less red meat and more health-friendly produce and legumes. By replacing some red meat with more plant-based options, they will also be helping mitigate the effects of climate change.

## PROMOTING HEALTH

**Reducing red meat in the diet helps reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.**

On average, Americans eat 3.1 ounces of red meat per day—much more than the 1.8 ounces that the USDA recommends. Studies link too much red meat in the diet to an increased risk of several serious chronic diseases. The American Heart Association recommends that individuals limit their intake of red meat to protect heart health.<sup>2</sup> A 2014 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that reducing red meat consumption lowered long-term diabetes risk.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified red meat as a “probable carcinogen,” and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends red meat reduction as a potentially effective workplace intervention to help prevent cancer.<sup>4,5</sup>

## ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

**Healthy, plant-forward options are a rising consumer trend.**

According to the 2016 National Restaurant Association “What’s Hot” survey, nearly 60 percent of professional chefs listed meatless items among the top culinary trends.<sup>6</sup> The food research firm Technomic surveyed 1,500 people online and found that 38 percent of consumers are more

likely to visit a restaurant that offers healthy options, even if they don’t end up ordering those items. This jumps to 50 percent among consumers ages 25 to 34.<sup>7</sup>

*Healthful, plant-forward menus that move meat from the center of the plate and feature more produce can be delicious and innovative.*

## REALIZING COST SAVINGS

**Diets with less red meat translate into savings on health costs.**

A 2016 Oxford study published by the National Academy of Sciences estimated that moving to more plant-based diets in line with standard dietary guidelines could save \$735 billion per year in health-related costs.<sup>8</sup> Employers can tap into these benefits through reduced insurance costs and increased productivity.

## SIGN THE CLIMATE-HEALTHY MENUS PLEDGE

Commit to reducing red meat purchases by 10 percent and increasing plant-based purchases by 5 percent per year over the next three years in your on-site dining. This can help move your institution toward achieving the health, employee engagement, and cost savings goals of your wellness program.

Sign the pledge here: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/climate-healthy-menus-commitment.pdf>.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Hope Health, *The Step-by-Step Guide to Successful Workplace Wellness Programs*, 2007, [www.uswwa.org/files/2010/11/WellnessReport.pdf](http://www.uswwa.org/files/2010/11/WellnessReport.pdf) (accessed June 29, 2016).
- 2 American Heart Association, “Eat More Chicken, Fish and Beans” 2013, [www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Nutrition/Eat-More-Chicken-Fish-and-Beans-than-Red-Meat\\_UCM\\_320278\\_Article.jsp#V3QFf010zIU](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/HealthyEating/Nutrition/Eat-More-Chicken-Fish-and-Beans-than-Red-Meat_UCM_320278_Article.jsp#V3QFf010zIU) (accessed June 29, 2016).
- 3 A. Pan et al., “Changes in Red Meat Consumption and Subsequent Risk of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: Three Cohorts of US Men and Women,” *JAMA Intern. Med.* 173, no. 14 (July 22, 2013): 1328-35, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23779232](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23779232).
- 4 International Agency for Research on Cancer, “IARC Monographs Evaluate Consumption of Red Meat and Processed Meat,” press release, October 26, 2015, [www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240\\_E.pdf](http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2015/pdfs/pr240_E.pdf) (accessed June 29, 2016).
- 5 Cancer Prevention in the Workplace Writing Group, “Cancer Prevention and Worksite Health Promotion: Time to Join Forces,” *Prev. Chronic Dis.* 11 (July 14, 2014): 140127, [http://www.cdc.gov/ped/issues/2014/14\\_0127.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ped/issues/2014/14_0127.htm) [http://www.cdc.gov/ped/issues/2014/14\\_0127.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ped/issues/2014/14_0127.htm).
- 6 National Restaurant Association, “What’s Hot: 2016 Culinary Forecast,” [www.restaurant.org/Downloads/PDFs/News-Research/WhatsHot2016](http://www.restaurant.org/Downloads/PDFs/News-Research/WhatsHot2016).
- 7 Restaurant Business Online, “Food Trends; What Healthy Means Now,” 2016, [www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/menu/food-trends/what-healthy-means-now](http://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/menu/food-trends/what-healthy-means-now).
- 8 M. Springman et al., “Analysis and Valuation of the Health and Climate Change Cobenefits of Dietary Change,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 15 (April 12, 2016): 4146-4151.



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