

TxNEA-R Strategies

This resource describes strategies for improving for improving health outcomes in prepared food environments based on each question of the Texas Nutrition Environment Assessment in Restaurants (TxNEA-R) survey. The strategies are intended to be revenue neutral or would generate revenue. Each question of the survey is followed by general strategies that restaurant owners and managers can utilize to make healthy choices easier at their establishments. Examples and resources are provided alongside strategies. Questions with same or similar content are grouped together. Survey questions that describe characteristics of the food outlet are not included.

How to Use this Tool

If you plan to work with each food outlet on a strategy that they choose, share this document with restaurant managers and discuss possible strategies with them. If you plan to implement a program that with the same strategy at each food outlet, use this tool to identify feasible strategies that would accomplish your goal.

You may need to collect additional information needed for your strategy. For example, if you want to promote main courses that come with two vegetables cooked with a healthier cooking method, you may need to make a note of which menu items fit this criteria. This can be noted in the Comments section.

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Questions 6, 18, and 27. Advertising and Promotions

6) Advertising and Promotions (outside)

Number of Ads

Less healthy foods*

Healthier foods*

Sugar-sweetened beverages*

Healthier beverages*

18) Advertising and displays (inside)

Number of advertisements/displays for **less healthy food***

Number of advertisements/displays for **healthier food***

Number of advertisements/displays for **sugar-sweetened beverages***

Number of advertisements/displays for **healthier beverages***

27) Children's menu Advertising and Promotions

Number of promotions for **healthier foods* or healthier beverages***

Number of promotions for **less healthy foods* or sugar-sweetened beverages***

Possible Strategies

- Add more advertisements/displays for healthier food and healthier beverages and if feasible, take away advertisements/displays for less healthy food and sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Create advertisements for specials which include healthier foods and beverages to encourage customers to choose these options.

Examples and Resources

- McDonald's created advertisements for a new McDonald's meal featuring a side salad instead of fries—"Simply a new choice for your McCombo"¹.
- Restaurants can join the Children's' Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB)².

- If a side salad can be substituted for an unhealthy side (French fries, tater tots, etc.), advertise the salad option and the cost.
- If there is a new healthier menu item, promote this item via advertisements or promotions.

- CFBAI is a voluntary self-regulation program designed to change the foods advertised to children under 12 to encourage healthier dietary choices².
- Joining CFBAI would add credibility and transparency to restaurants' efforts to support a healthy food environment.

Questions 18 and 27. Healthy Options Identified

18) Advertising and displays (inside)

Healthy options are identified and/or prominently displayed in the following ways:

- Participating in a branded recognition program* Yes No
- Nutrition information labeled Yes No
- Health-related pictures, symbols or logos Yes No
- Key words used Yes No
- Highlighted using bold, larger or different font Yes No
- Listed first in each menu category Yes No
- Healthy options are not identified or prominently displayed Yes No

Other:

27) Children's menu Advertising and Promotions

There is nutrition information on the menu. Yes No

Possible Strategies

- Identify and/or prominently display healthy food options so that customers are more likely to purchase and consume these foods.
 - Participate in a branded recognition program to make consumers more aware of healthy eating options.
- Draw attention to healthy choices on the menu and throughout the restaurant.
 - List healthier options first in each menu category.
 - Include nutrition information on the menu so customers can make more informed decisions about their meals.

Examples and Resources

- Por Vida is a San Antonio-based, voluntary menu labeling and recognition program for food service establishments that offer healthy menu items³.
 - Por Vida only requires restaurants to label the specific menu items that meet set nutrition criteria³, making this a good starting point for restaurants who may not be ready to provide nutritional information for every single menu item.
- A team of dietitians and the National Restaurant Association work with restaurants nationwide to offer Kids LiveWell menu choices⁴.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents can use nutritional information on menus to help make choices for their children that are most appropriate for their age/size. • Highlight healthier options by using bold, larger, or different font on the menu. • Use key words to bring attention to healthy options. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex. “Fresh”, “Energizing”, “Smart Option”, “Power” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids LiveWell choices emphasize lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy, and meet specific nutritional criteria⁴. • Kids LiveWell program requires that restaurants offer at least one full children’s meal and one other item that meet the NRA standards, display or make available upon request the nutrition profile of the healthful menu options, and promote/identify healthful menu options⁴. • Food items at beginning or end categories on the menu are more popular than food items in the middle⁵. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote healthier options within each category of menus by putting these options at the beginning or end of menu categories. • Including nutrition information on menus allows parents to make healthier choices for children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex. Parents who were offered a children’s meal with calorie information ordered an average of 100 fewer calories for their children compared to parents ordering from menus without calorie information⁶. |
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Question 9. Complimentary Items

9) Which complimentary items, if any, are automatically brought to the table before the meal without asking?

(Choose all that apply)

- Water
- Tortilla chips
- Vegetable-based sauce
- Bread, corn bread, or biscuits
- Butter or oil
- None
- Other:
- There are no tables.

Possible Strategies

- Bring water before asking for drink orders.
- Consider not offering or charging for free foods such as tortilla chips, salsa, bread, cornbread, biscuits, butter and oil.
- Offer the free food items as a choice instead of giving them automatically.
- Offer an appetizer bar so that customers can serve themselves if they choose. Some customers may not want the free items.

Examples and Resources

- Cantina Southwestern Grill in Salt Lake City, UT offers a self-serve chip machine with a salsa bar featuring six different options. Customers appreciate the variety of dips and the ability to choose as much or as little as they want⁷.

Questions 12 and 23. Proteins

12) Proteins

Cooking Method
Healthier* Less Healthy*

Number of **lean** proteins

Number of **high fat** proteins

23) Proteins on the children's menu

Cooking Method
Healthier* Less Healthy*

Lean proteins*

High fat proteins*

Possible Strategies

- Offer more lean proteins.
 - Ex. If only beef is tacos are offered, consider offering grilled chicken as another options.
 - Ex. If cheeseburgers or hamburgers are offered, consider adding a turkey burger or grilled chicken burger option.
- Switch cooking methods from less healthy to healthier for already-existing menu items.
 - Less healthy cooking methods include fried, breaded, crusted, sautéed in butter, creamy, with cheese, sugar added, buttered, or tossed with a creamy dressing or sauce.
 - Healthier cooking methods include grilled, broiled, baked, steamed, poached, roasted, raw, sautéed, stewed, cooked in vegetable-based sauce, or served raw (sushi meat or raw fruits and vegetables).

Examples and Resources

- In 2014 Del Taco became the first Mexican fast food chain to offer ground turkey as a protein option to replace ground beef. Based on customer feedback, the new turkey menu items were a success⁸.
- Uncle Maddio’s Pizza Joint sells pizzas with beef as well as hormone-free poultry. They sell three times the volume in hormone-free poultry than beef products. To encourage customers to order more non-beef items, most of the brand’s limited time offers focus on poultry products⁸.
- Chick-fil-A added grilled chicken nuggets as an alternative to fried chicken nuggets in 2012 to provide a healthy entrée option. The move marked the first time a national fast food chain offered a grilled entrée as part of a children’s menu⁹.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a healthy cooking method option available for all items so customers can make a healthy food choice.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ex. If fried chicken strips are offered on the existing menu, include on the menu that chicken strips can be grilled. | |
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Questions 13 and 24. Vegetables and Fruits

	Healthier*	Less Healthy*
13) Vegetables and Fruits		
Number of vegetable* sides offered	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Number of fruit* sides offered	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
24) Vegetables and Fruits on Children's Menu	Healthier*	Less Healthy*
Number of vegetable* sides offered	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Number of fruit* sides offered	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Possible Strategies	Examples and Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer more vegetable and fruit side options to give customers a greater variety to meet their preferences. • Fast food/fast casual restaurants and gas stations/convenience stores can offer 'hand fruits' (oranges, apples, bananas) at points of purchase so customers are reminded of this option. • Highlight vegetable and fruit side options on menus. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex. If cartoon children or animals are part of a children's menu design, they could be eating fruits or vegetables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a limited-time offer to test how fresh fruit would work within their operation (storage, cooking methods, etc.) and how customers will react to the new offerings. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex. Daphne's California Greek used a limited-time-offer to incorporate fruit in 2011. Daphne's developed a fresh mango salsa to be included with a Mango and Shrimp Salad. The restaurant owners learned how to best handle the fruit in terms of spoilage and shelf life¹⁰. • Restaurants can follow a similar process to introduce fruit sides to their menu. Fruits intended to be side items can be introduced as a limited time side or as part of a main entrée. • Chick-fil-A added Buddy Fruits Pure Blended Fruit To Go applesauce as side option in 2012 and a Fruit Cup side added to the menu in 2014⁹.

Questions 14 and 25. Meals with Fruits and Vegetables

14) Meals with Fruits and Vegetables

Number of **main courses** with at least 2 vegetable or fruit side options

Number of main courses with at least 2 vegetables or fruits with a healthier cooking method as the default side or as part of the main course. (includes salads)

25) Meals with Fruits and Vegetables

Number of **main courses** with at least 2 vegetable or fruit side options

Number of **main courses** with at least 2 vegetables or fruits with a healthier cooking method as the default side or as part of the main course as the default side or as part of the main course. (includes salads)

Possible Strategies

- Include at least 2 vegetable or fruit side options with more main courses.
- Add more main courses with at least 2 vegetables or fruits with a healthier cooking method as the default side or as part of the main course.
 - Customers are more likely to order the sides that come with meals rather than requesting substitutions.
- Allow customers to make any regular menu salad a side salad, which increases the number of vegetable sides offered and can be part of an entrée-side combination.
- Allow customers to mix and match entrée items with any two sides. This way, every main course has at least two vegetable or fruit side options as long as there are vegetable and fruit options available as sides on the menu.

Examples and Resources

- Luby’s restaurant menu includes the LuAnn entrée, “the original value meal.” This meal comes with an entrée, any two sides from the menu and a roll¹¹.
 - Because customers can choose from any sides on the menu, this option makes all Luby’s entrees considered a main course with at least two vegetable or fruit side options.
- Instead of a traditional sides menu, Threadgill’s restaurant offers a selection of vegetables. The menu entrees are all served with the customer’s choice of any two vegetables from the vegetables section¹².
 - With this menu, sides are not automatically assigned to entrees, so customers have the choice of adding any two sides to their meal. Because there are so many vegetable side options for customers to choose from, customers are more likely to select vegetables as sides for their meal.

Questions 15 and 26. Grains

15) Grains

How many of the following items are available?

Grains*

Whole Grains*

Main courses with a whole grain* included or as the default side

26) Grains on Children's Menu

Number of grains offered on the menu

Number of whole grains offered on menu

Main courses with a whole grain* included as the default side or within the entrée

Possible Strategies

- Make whole grains more available to customers to increase customer satisfaction.
 - Introducing new whole grains to the menu like quinoa, farro, amaranth, millet, sorghum, barley and teff, gives the restaurant an opportunity to add global foods to the menu which may appeal to many customers.
 - Ex. Teff is traditionally used in Ethiopian cuisine¹⁴.

Examples and Resources

- California Pizza Kitchen added whole grains to their menu in 2009. Customers can order any of the restaurant's pizzas on a honey wheat with whole grain crust and any of the pasta dishes on multigrain penne¹³.
- Many chain restaurants are offering one or more whole grain options on their menus¹⁴.
- Pei Wei Asian Market has a simple yet effective strategy for highlighting whole grains. Employees always give diners the option of brown or white rice, rather than only serving brown rice if the customer asks. The chain

- Offer whole grain options along with grains already offered on the menu rather than only as an alternative when customers ask.
 - Ex. If white rice is included with a meal, offer brown rice as an option.
- For buffet-style restaurants, add more whole grain offerings.
 - Ex. If noodles and sauces are part of a buffet bar, include whole grain noodles either as an alternative or as the only noodle option.
- Add more main courses with whole grains included or as the default side with the meal.
 - Ex. If meals come with a refined-grain bread roll automatically, change the menu so that meals automatically come with a whole wheat roll.
 - If a whole grain is the default side, more people are likely to eat the whole grain rather than ask for a refined-grain substitution.

reported brown rice selling 45 percent of the time with this technique¹⁵.

- Disney parks offer different whole grains at their restaurants and food kiosks. Whole grain pastas are available for substitute at many locations¹⁶.

Questions 16 and 27. Desserts

16) Dessert* (not plain fruit)

Number of desserts

Number of meals that come with a dessert

27) Children's menu Advertising and Promotions

Dessert* (other than fruit) is included with the meal.

Yes No

Possible Strategies

- Offer smaller sizes on desserts or note on the dessert menus how many can be served with a single dessert.
- Instead of including dessert as part of a meal, offer desserts a la carte instead of as a combo with meals.
- If only some desserts on the menu are selling well, only offer those desserts to avoid waste.
- Instead of including dessert as part of a meal, offer desserts a la carte.

Examples and Resources

- Atlanta-based restaurant Rathburn's, a table service restaurant serving American food, decided to introduce mini desserts, which allow customers the opportunity to make a healthier dessert choice (smaller portion)¹⁷.
 - After Rathburn's introduced mini-desserts to their menu they saw dessert sales soar, with up to 80 percent of their customers ordering dessert. They also saw increases in sales of other after-meal items¹⁷.

Questions 17 and 21. Beverages

<p>17) How many of the following beverages are available?</p> <p>Unsweetened, no-calorie beverages <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <p>Diet soda or other diet beverage <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <p>Sugar sweetened beverages* <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <p>Unsweetened milk or milk product <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <p>100% fruit juice <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p>	<p>Free Refills?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>21) Children's Menu Beverages The default beverage served with the meal is: (choose from options below)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsweetened, no-calorie beverage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Diet soda or other diet beverage</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sugar Sweetened beverages*</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unsweetened milk or milk product</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 100% fruit juice</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No default beverage</p>	<p>Free Refills?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not available</p>

Possible Strategies

- Offer healthier beverage options like water, unsweetened milk or milk products, unsweetened, and no-calorie beverages.
- Only offer free refills on unsweetened beverages. This may encourage some customers to order a healthier beverage to avoid paying for refills.

Examples and Resources

- In 2013, Subway was the only restaurant chain that does not offer sugar drinks as an option with kids meals, instead including low-fat milk or bottled water with all of its kid-sized subs¹⁸.
- By 2015, Wendy's, McDonald's, Arby's and Panera joined Subway in providing healthier options as the default beverage with their kid meals¹⁸.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move the refill station behind the counter. Customers are less likely to take advantage of refills if have to go through an extra person/step. • Limit sizes of sugar-sweetened beverages (ex: 16oz). From a business perspective, larger cups promote waste because not many customers will be able to consume a larger beverage before the ice melts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will decrease consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages which are the single largest source of added sugar and top source of calorie intake in the US diet. Reducing consumption will ultimately lead to a decreased risk of obesity and related diseases²⁰. • Offer unsweetened, no calorie beverages, unsweetened milk or milk product and 100% fruit juice as the default beverages served with children's meals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These healthier choices send a message to children and their parents that these are the beverages children should be consuming. • Do not offer sugar-sweetened beverages as the default beverage served with children's meals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who drink more soft drinks consume more calories than children who consume fewer soft drinks and are more likely to become overweight²¹. Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages can displace healthier foods from their diets. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2012, Chick-fil-A improved children's beverage offerings to feature only one percent milk, 100 percent apple juice, Chick-fil-A's freshly squeezed lemonade and water⁹. • In 2015, Burger King dropped fountain drinks from its children's menu boards and they are no longer merchandised as part of Burger King Kids Meals¹⁹. |
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Question 18. Smaller Portions

18) Advertising and displays (inside)

Smaller portions are offered or meals can be split. Yes No

If no, skip to substitutions question.

- Age Restrictions
- Time Restrictions
- Smaller portion priced lower than full size portion
- No charge for splitting meals

Wording on the menu encourages larger portions. Yes No

Lower price for adding or bundling items. Yes No

Possible Strategies

- Offer smaller portions on menu items. By offering smaller portions of meals, more customers will choose this option and will consume fewer calories simply because less food came on the plate.
 - Remove age and time restrictions on smaller meals to maximize the availability and consumption.
 - Offer smaller portions using value pricing for customers who want a smaller portion.
 - Ex. Offer a smaller meal that is 70% of the food of the original meal size, but at 85% of the cost of the original meal.
 - Customers who purchase the smaller portion may want more variety, so offer healthy add-ons, like plain fruit or a side salad.
 - Allow customers to split meals at no additional charge. This gives customers the opportunity to be served (and therefore eat) a smaller amount of food.

Examples and Resources

- One study²² looked at the effects of offering customers the opportunity to downsize portions of side dishes at a Chinese fast-food restaurant. They found that 14-33 percent of customers accepted the downsizing offer, and they did so whether or not they were offered a nominal discount. The customers who accepted the downsizing offer did not tend to compensate by ordering more calories in their entrees and on average reduced their total meal calories by over 200.
 - These findings show the potential importance of portion control interventions that specifically activate consumers' self-control.
 - Restaurants could implement something similar by having smaller portions on the menu available in addition to having servers ask customers if they would like to be served a smaller portion of entrees.

- Portion reduction is more feasible with items like rice, chili, or pasta²³.
- Avoid using wording on the menu which encourages larger portions.

- Coke offers 7.5oz cans generally sold in eight-packs in stores. Even though the smaller packages offer less value to consumers (and therefore more money for Coke), these smaller drinks dominate the soft drink market²⁴.

Questions 18 and 27. Substitutions

18) Advertising and displays (inside)

Are substitutions* allowed?

- Yes, with extra charge on all items
- No
- Yes, with extra charge on some items
- Not sure
- Yes, with no extra charge

27) Children's menu Advertising and Promotions

A vegetable, fruit, or whole grain prepared with a healthier cooking method can be substituted for assigned side with no extra charge.

- Yes
- No

Possible Strategies

- Allow substitutions on menu items when possible, with an added charge only if the substituted item is more expensive than the original item.
 - Allowing substitutions allows those with allergies or dietary restrictions to order more menu items, making the restaurant more inclusive.
- Allow a vegetable, fruit or whole grain prepared with a healthier cooking method to be substituted for an assigned side with no extra charge.
 - Include advertisements or bring attention to the fact that healthier items can be substituted at no extra charge.

Examples and Resources

- The Steeping Room, table-service restaurants in Austin, TX, caters to customers with allergies and dietary restrictions²⁵. Their menu reads “You must let your server know if you need to make your food gluten free or vegan or have other dietary concerns.”
 - Menu items are marked V if they can be made vegan and GFF if they can be made gluten free friendly. Included is the phrase “May incur additional charge and preparation time” to make customers aware before ordering²⁵.

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