

Nourishing catering for meetings and events

A guide for organisations and caterers

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

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Why providing nourishing catering is important

Choosing nourishing food* supports wellbeing, boosts energy, brings variety and balance to events and is a way to celebrate cultural diversity. This guide highlights recommended food and drink for catering and provides sample menus that can be used by organisations and caterers.

For terms marked with an asterisk (*), see Explanatory Notes.

Overarching principles

1. **Provide plenty of vegetables and fruit in a colourful variety.**
2. **Prioritise whole food* and less-processed food.***
   - Include wholegrains, fresh, frozen or canned fruit, vegetables and legumes,* nuts and seeds, and reduced-fat milk products.
3. **Offer balanced main meals.**
   - Include vegetables, whole grains, protein-rich food such as legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas), eggs, fish and other seafood, poultry, lean meat and/or milk products.
   - Include at least one vegetarian main item to support and normalise plant-based eating.* This also helps meet a range of dietary needs and preferences (cultural, religious and personal choices).
   - Offer food that celebrates and respects a variety of cultures, traditions and special dietary needs (such as gluten-free and halal).
4. **Choose food lower in salt, saturated fat and added sugar* and higher in heart healthy fats.***
5. **Make water the main drink and don't offer drinks high in added sugar.***
6. **Be mindful of portion sizes and oversupply.**
   - Provide smaller portions, especially items like pastries, slices and baked goods, so people can sample a range of options while still eating in a way that feels comfortable for them.
   - Check attendee numbers and dietary needs beforehand to help reduce oversupply.
7. **Consider sustainability.**
   - Choose seasonal food and reduce single-use packaging.

Conversation guide – how to work with your caterer

Creating a nourishing menu requires collaboration between organisers and caterers. When placing orders, organisers may not always know the ingredients or preparation methods used. Effective communication helps ensure healthier options are provided:

- Request wholegrain or wholemeal bread for sandwiches, even when white bread is the default, as these options are usually available upon request.
- Request that traditionally deep-fried food be prepared using oven-baking, pan-frying or air-frying methods to reduce fat content.
- Ask for healthier spreads and dips like hummus, peanut butter, reduced-fat cream cheese, reduced-fat sour cream or Greek yoghurt instead of butter, cream cheese and sour cream.
- Prioritise fruit platters or legume-based dishes in the brief provided to your caterers. Fresh fruit provides a simple, lighter sweet option without increasing the number of sweet baked goods. Where possible, pair sweet items with fruit and/or yoghurt to support balance and variety.
- Request that bakery items be provided or served in smaller portions such as slicing muffins in half.
- Choose menu items that can accommodate multiple dietary requirements rather than offering separate dishes. This improves inclusivity and ensures all guests can participate equally. For instance, options such as lentil and vegetable curry, tofu rice paper rolls, egg or tofu sushi, vegetable fried rice and vegetable sticks with hummus or avocado dip can suit vegetarian, gluten-free and dairy-free diets.



Recommended food and drink for catering

There is a time and place for a range of food for nourishment, celebration and connection. This guide encourages a balanced 'choose some, choose most' approach aligned with the National Food and Drink Policy | Health New Zealand:

- **Choose most:** Aim to mostly provide food that promotes health and wellbeing.
- **Choose some:** This food has moderate levels of saturated fat* and/or added sugar* or salt although it may have some nutritional value. It can be enjoyed occasionally or in smaller amounts.

Category	Choose most	Choose some
Platters  See Creating Nourishing Food Platters (link) for more examples.	Made with fruit, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, lean meat, lower-fat cheese **Grain food** Grainy crackers, wholemeal pita wedges, corn thins **Vegetables** Vegetable sticks (carrot, cucumber, celery, capsicum), cherry tomatoes, canned baby beetroot, roasted vegetables **Fruit** In season e.g. mandarins, kiwifruit, pears, strawberries **Cheese** Lower-fat cheese (edam, feta, mozzarella, reduced fat cheddar, cottage, ricotta) **Nuts** Roasted almonds, cashews, peanuts (unsalted or lightly salted) **Protein food** Cooked chicken pieces, meatballs or tofu and vegetable skewers, mussels, devilled eggs, falafel **Savoury** Sushi, dumplings, rice paper rolls **Dips and sauces** Hummus, tzatziki, satay, pesto, salsa, chutney, guacamole, reduced-salt soy sauce	Made with plain grains, minimal vegetables, high-fat and processed meat **Grain food** Plain crackers, rice crackers, plain pita wedges **Vegetables** Pickled or marinated vegetables (sundried tomato, olives, gherkins), processed vegetables (cauliflower bites, wedges) **Cheese** Cream cheese, camembert, brie, haloumi, tasty, colby, cheddar, blue cheese **Fruit** Dried fruit (apricots, dates, figs) **Nuts** Salted or sugar/chocolate-coated nuts **Protein and savoury food** Chicken nibbles, luncheon, ham, smoked fish, salami, sausage, pre-prepared crumbed fish or chicken, baked spring rolls **Dips and sauces** Sour cream and other creamy dips, soy sauce

Category	Choose most	Choose some
Savoury items 	**Sandwiches, wraps, rolls and sliders** • Wholemeal or wholegrain bread • Salad or grilled vegetables • Grilled chicken, roast beef, canned fish, falafel, tofu, lean meat, bean patties • Lower-fat cheese (cottage, edam) • Margarine spread, avocado, hummus, peanut butter, pesto, chutney	**Sandwiches, wraps, rolls and sliders** • White bread or high-fat bread (croissants, brioche) • Higher-fat cheese (cheddar, tasty, cream cheese) • Salami, bacon, deep fried chicken/seafood or crumbed chicken or fish
	Salads Build salads with a balance of vegetables, whole grains, protein rich food and flavourful low-fat dressings • Plenty of vegetables • Lean protein food (beans, eggs, cooked fish, chicken, lean meat) • Nuts or seeds • Light dressings (vinaigrette, lemon juice-based)	**Salads** • Potato or pasta-based salad containing minimal vegetable or processed meat (ham, bacon, salami, sausage), creamy dressing
	**Sushi and rice paper rolls** • One or more non-tuber vegetable (lettuce, cabbage, cucumber, carrot, avocado) • Lean protein food (eggs, skinless chicken, prawns, tofu) • Reduced-salt soy sauce, lite cream cheese, reduced-sugar sauces (sweet chilli)	**Sushi and rice paper rolls** • Processed meat (crumbed/katsu chicken, surimi, crab nuggets, smoked salmon/chicken) • Inari pockets • Regular mayonnaise, cream cheese

Category	Choose most	Choose some
	**Warm items** • Pasta dishes with vegetables and/or legumes • Curries with vegetables and/or legumes • Lean meat, fish, poultry or tofu and vegetable skewers • Steamed or pan-fried dumplings with vegetable filling • Corn fritters, lean meatballs • Grilled or steamed fish, mussels • Chop suey with plenty of vegetables • Stir-fried rice or noodles with vegetables and minimal or no processed meat (bacon, salami, sausage) • Pizza topped with vegetables and lean meat and minimal or no processed meat *If using takeaways for catering, see Guidance on improving takeaway choices for catering for some ideas.*	**Warm items** • Pasta dishes with minimal vegetables such as macaroni cheese • Curries containing minimal vegetables • Pizza with ham, sausage or salami topping • Stir-fried rice or noodles, chop suey with processed meat (bacon, salami, sausage) • Small plain fried bread • Steamed or pan-fried dumplings without vegetable filling • Oven-baked spring rolls or samosas without vegetable filling
Savoury bakery 	Savoury baked items made mostly from whole grains, vegetables, legumes, nuts or seeds • Wholemeal vegetable pinwheel scones • Sun-dried tomato, olive and sunflower seed muffin • Vegetable frittata	Scones, scrolls, muffins containing minimal whole grains, fruit, vegetables, nuts/seeds, processed meat • Small cheese scones or plain scones • Small ham and cheese scrolls
	Bread case, sliced potato or filo pastry • Wholemeal bread vegetable quiches • Filo parcels with vegetable filling (spinach, feta) • Mini potato-top pies	Pastry with minimal vegetables • Mini pies • Mini sausage rolls • Small pastry-based quiches
	Specialty bread containing vegetable or wholegrains • Vegetable pizza bread • Spinach and feta bread twists *See more Example GREEN Baked Items in the National Food and Drink Policy.*	Specialty bread, minimal vegetables or wholegrains • Fruit buns • Small cheese and bacon buns • Small croissants • Soft pretzels

Category	Choose most	Choose some
Sweet bakery 	Items containing wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, nuts/seeds with no icing or chocolate • Mini apple bran muffins • Small blueberry and almond friands • Wholemeal date scones, cut into quarters • Banana walnut loaf (small slices) • Mini oat raisin biscuits *See more Example GREEN Baked Items in the National Food and Drink Policy.*	Items with thin or drizzled icing or a little chocolate within products • Mini cupcakes • Mini pancakes • Danish pastries, cut into quarters • Small brioches • Mini plain or chocolate chip cookies • Small donuts
Soups 	Vegetable, whole grain or legume-based soups with: • No or minimal processed meat such as ham • No or minimal cream or coconut cream (minestrone, pumpkin and lentil, potato and leek, chicken and corn) • For soups made with meat, skim off visible excess fat before serving Served with: Wholegrain bread or rolls	• Creamy soups containing at least one vegetable, whole grains or legumes • Soups containing bacon, sausage or ham hock with excess fat skimmed off • Soups containing cream, sour cream or coconut cream (seafood chowder, pea and ham hock) Served with: White bread, fry bread, and breads with processed meats on top e.g. pizza bread.
Drink 	Plain, spring or mineral water: • Garnished with fruit, vegetables or herbs (citrus slices, cucumber slices, mint sprigs) Plain tea and coffee (hot or iced) • Offer decaffeinated coffee, herbal and fruit teas. • Provide milk, calcium-fortified plant milk and artificial sweetener* as alternatives for adding to coffee or tea *See more examples in Choosing drinks to support wellbeing.*	• Sparkling or soda water with zero sugar • Fruit/vegetable juice diluted with still or sparkling water • Drink sweetened with non-sugar sweetener • 100% juice with no added sugar, ideally diluted • Flavoured milk lower in sugar

Category	Choose most	Choose some
Sauces, spreads, dressings and garnishes 	• Balsamic vinegar, ponzu sauce (citrus-based sauce) • Lite or low-fat mayonnaise • Reduced-salt soy sauce, reduced-sugar sweet chilli or tomato sauce • Hummus, babaganoush (eggplant dip), tzatziki, raita (yoghurt-based dips), plain yoghurt • Pesto, chutney, relish	• Creamy salad dressings, standard mayonnaise • Standard table sauces (sweet chilli, tomato, BBQ)
Crunchy snacks 	• Vegetable sticks, cherry tomatoes, cut fresh fruit • Unsalted nuts and seeds • Grainy or seed crackers, brown rice crackers, corn thins • Roasted, lightly salted chickpeas or broad beans • Air popped popcorn • Natural unsalted corn chips	• Roasted, salted nuts • Dried fruit and banana chips • Pretzels, Bhuja mix or corn nibbles • Trail mix (nuts, seeds, dark chocolate and coconut chips) • Bliss balls or muesli bars • White or flavoured crackers • Chips with a 3 Health Star Rating or above • Seaweed snacks

Sample menus

This guide shows how catering guidelines can be used in planning a variety of menus. Following the **choose most** and **choose some** approach to allow for flexibility while still aligning with the guidelines.

Menu setting	Autumn/winter menu	Summer/spring menu
Every day 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Roasted nut and seed mix • Wholegrain crackers, celery and carrot sticks with hummus • Small apple and bran muffins • Fruit and yoghurt **Main meal** • Thai green chicken and vegetable curry with rice • Vegetarian lasagne • Roast pumpkin, feta and spinach salad • Warm ginger loaf with custard	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Brie cheese, pesto dip with brown rice crackers • Savoury vegetable muffins • Cut fresh fruit • Medjool dates (optional: stuff with peanut butter and roll in coconut) **Main meal** • Spinach and feta quiche • Niçoise salad (potato, green beans, egg or tuna, olive oil dressing) • Cucumber, tomato, walnut and couscous salad • Oat and fruit slice
Celebratory events 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Baked vegetable spring rolls • Platter with wholegrain crackers, cheese, hummus, pesto, vegetable sticks, nuts and seasonal fruit • Mini kūmara frittata • Small fruit crumble slice **Main meal** • Baked fish or roast chicken or beef • Sautéed green beans with lemon and almonds • Roasted root vegetables with halloumi • Spinach and feta filo triangles • Mini salted caramel squares	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Small date scones • Bruschetta (toasted bread) with different toppings (creamy pea and mint spread, roasted tomato and ricotta, pomegranate, walnut and cottage cheese, tomato and sardine) • Seasonal fruit kebabs with yoghurt or passionfruit coulis dip **Main meal** • Chicken/lean meat, tofu and vegetable skewers • Assorted sushi (chicken, prawn, egg or tofu, avocado and vegetables filling) • Vegetable – based salads option(s) i.e. • Corn and avocado salad, watermelon, cucumber and feta salad • Mini fruit tartlets

Menu setting	Autumn/winter menu	Summer/spring menu
Supermarket-based convenient catering 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Grazing platter (sliced fresh fruit, cheese, wholegrain crackers, hummus, pesto, vegetable sticks, nuts, dried fruit) • Mini muffins • Corn chips (at least 4 HSR) with salsa **Main meal** • Rotisserie chicken • Pre-made vegetable quiche • Salad options (couscous with vegetables, egg and potato salad, green salad, coleslaw) • Oat bars (at least 3.5 HSR)	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Scones (cheese, date or sultana) cut into halves or quarters • Vegetable sticks with hummus or yoghurt-based dip • Mini pastry (apple turnovers, Danish) • Seasonal fruit (grapes, strawberries) **Main meal** • DIY sandwich bar – bread rolls with a variety of fillings such as plenty of salad and vegetables (lettuce, tomato, cucumber, grated carrot) and some protein-rich food (egg, chicken, roast beef, canned fish, cheese, hummus) • Quinoa or brown rice summer salad with feta • Yoghurt tubs and fresh fruit (watermelon, berries)
Hearty and filling 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Cheese and vegetable scones • Baked vegetable spring rolls or small samosa • Sliced seasonal fruit **Main meal** • Soup such as minestrone, lentil and pumpkin, boil up with vegetables (fat skimmed) served with wholegrain rolls or fried bread • Lean beef meatballs in tomato basil sauce served with pasta or rice • Roasted vegetable salad with balsamic glaze and toasted seeds • Coconut rice pudding	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Baked filo pastry triangles with vegetable filling (spinach and ricotta cheese) • Banana walnut loaf (served in small slices) • Seasonal fruit platter **Main meal** • Vegetable-packed dumplings (chicken, pork, prawn, egg or tofu and vegetables) • Chicken chop suey with plenty of vegetables • Egg and vegetable fried rice • Salad (apple slaw, green bean and broccoli, Caesar) • Baked seasonal fruit served with custard or yoghurt

Menu setting	Autumn/winter menu	Summer/spring menu
Children and young people 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Fruit and yoghurt cup • Mini pikelets • Mousetraps (yeast spread and grilled cheese on toast) • Stuffed eggs **Main meal** • Mini sausage rolls with reduced sugar/salt tomato sauce • Oven-baked chips or wedges loaded with baked beans and cheese • Fennel, apple and cabbage coleslaw • Mini blueberry muffins	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Smoothies made from fruit, vegetables, yoghurt, milk • Corn and cheese roll-ups • Celery/carrot sticks with peanut butter, or hummus **Main meal** • Roast soy and honey chicken drumsticks • Assorted sushi or rice paper rolls with fish, chicken, prawn, egg or tofu, avocado and vegetable filling • Rainbow salad jars • Sliced seasonal fresh fruit
Vegetarian 	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Small oat and raisin biscuits • Feta and pumpkin frittata • Seasonal fruit **Main meal** • Lentil potato top pie • Roasted root vegetables with falafel • Steamed or stir-fried greens • Wholemeal carrot cake bites	**Snacks (morning or afternoon tea)** • Wholegrain crackers, brown rice crackers with hummus or avocado mash • Small apple bran muffins • Mixed nuts **Main meal** • Sweet and sour tofu stir fry with vegetables and rice or noodles • Egg and salad sandwiches • Vegetable sticks with satay sauce • Season fruit platter (watermelon, strawberries, orange) • Dark chocolate and almond clusters

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