Promoting healthy meetings in the WHO South-East Asia Region

Considering the increasing burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCD) in the Region, much of it attributed to unhealthy lifestyles, all opportunities for promoting healthier lives should be identified and supported. Reducing the major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, tobacco use and the harmful use of alcohol – is a key focus of WHO’s programme to prevent morbidity and mortality from NCDs.

WHO has been advocating the implementation of workplace health programmes as a setting for primary prevention of NCD risk factors. Workplaces encompass a substantial proportion of the population from a wide variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and is an opportune setting for introducing preventive actions to reduce risk of lifestyle-related NCDs.

Meetings and events make up a significant part of a working day of individuals who work in office settings. Therefore, promoting and supporting healthy behaviours at meetings is one of many strategic approaches that are likely to improve workplace health. The Secretariat in 2019 developed and disseminated to WHO country offices ‘A guide to planning healthy meetings’ to support healthier meetings organized by WHO. This background paper on promoting healthy meetings has been prepared as a supporting document to the Decision proposed by Thailand for the Seventy-fourth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia to consider. The revised Guide to Healthy Meetings is annexed herein.
Background

1. Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) threaten progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a target of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one third by 2030. Four major NCDs – cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer – account for an estimated 8.5 million deaths annually in the WHO South-East Asia Region.¹

2. NCDs are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors. One of the objectives of the Global Action Plan for the Prevention of NCDs is to reduce modifiable risk factors for noncommunicable diseases and underlying social determinants through the creation of health-promoting environments.² Therefore, reducing the major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol – is the focus of WHO’s work to prevent deaths from NCDs. At the regional level, “NCD prevention and control, through multisectoral policies and plans, with focus on ‘best buys’ interventions”, which cover the major risk factors, were declared one of the Region’s Flagship Priority Programmes in 2014.

3. Tackling NCDs requires comprehensive actions covering interventions targeted both at individuals and the population at large, and WHO has been advocating the implementation of workplace health programmes as a setting for primary prevention of NCD risk factors.³

4. Many Member states in the Region implement various forms of healthy lifestyle initiatives in workplaces, including healthier meals and promotion of physical activity. The WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia has been actively promoting healthier work environments over the last five years with an initiative called “Be the Change”, which encourages healthier lifestyles in the workplace.⁴ The initiative also extended beyond the day-to-day work environment to include meetings as an opportunity to create an enabling environment for healthier behaviours.

5. Meetings are an important part of the office mindscape, and involve travel, sitting for long periods of time, and often the consumption of high volumes of snacks and meals which are high in sugar, salt and fats. In 2018, the World Health Organization joined with partners and the public from Geneva and worldwide to stage the “Walk the Talk: the Health for All Challenge” event during the Seventy-first World Health Assembly. A similar event was conducted at the UN General Assembly in 2019, which the SEA Region Member States were actively involved in planning and coordinating.


6. In order to facilitate organizing meetings where healthy lifestyles are advocated and practised, the WHO Regional Office prepared a document titled *A guide to planning healthy meetings* in 2019. The guide was shared with WHO country offices to support planning and implementing WHO-organized meetings. The guide covers aspects such as planning for healthier foods to be served at meetings, promoting physical activity, ensuring tobacco-free settings and promoting environmental sustainability during meetings. A similar document titled *Planning health and sustainable meetings: a practical guide* has also been made available by the WHO European Region.

**Promoting healthier meetings during and post COVID-19 pandemic**

7. The physical and social environment in workplaces shapes many lifestyle choices, and may have an impact on people’s health. Ultimately, the type and amount of food intake, physical activity, tobacco use or alcohol intake is an individual choice, but such are likely to be influenced by the environment. Healthy meetings also serve as an opportunity to promote and showcase healthy lifestyle choices. Another aspect to promote in healthy meetings is the level of attention to preventing other occupational health issues such eye strain and occupational back/spine pain, with sharing of information on how both virtual and physical meetings can be healthier in terms of ergonomics.

8. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the enhanced risk of infection for persons with NCDs, specially hypertension, diabetes and lung disease, highlighting an urgent need to promote healthier lifestyles towards reducing risk of NCDs. The current pandemic has also shown the feasibility of virtual meetings as an alternative to physical meetings, which has environmental benefits in terms of envisaging less transport and travel. However, health is a significant concern even in virtual meetings, and actions to promote healthy lifestyle choices during virtual meetings and events also needs consideration.

9. The ongoing pandemic has also drawn attention to other aspects of meetings such as the need for public health measures, particularly physical distancing, sanitation and hygiene.

**Action areas to be considered to promote healthier meetings**

10. Some key aspects which can be implemented to ensure a healthier meeting environment are included below:

**Alcohol**

11. Alcohol use is responsible for more than 1 in 20 deaths globally and also affects mortality in the WHO South-East Asia Region. The societal costs of alcohol affecting the partners, children, families and communities of drinkers are estimated to be twice that incurred by the consumers of alcohol themselves. The per capita alcohol consumption has been increasing substantially in the South-East Asia Region since 2000.

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12. In 2018, acknowledging the urgency to control and prevent the alcohol-related public health and development burden, WHO launched “SAFER” – an action package prioritizing five high impact WHO “best buys” and “good buys”.\(^2\) Incorporating the prevention of alcohol sale and consumption within broader workplace health and well-being programmes and supporting healthy lifestyle choices may motivate behavioural change in reducing alcohol consumption. Extending the same action to meetings and events can be a promotional mechanism for participants to consider the harm caused by alcohol.

### Diet and food safety

13. Healthy eating and considerations of food safety supports optimum weight, decreases the risk of chronic diseases, and prevents foodborne diseases. Increased production of processed foods, rapid urbanization and changing lifestyles have led to a shift in dietary patterns with greater consumption of more foods that are high in energy, fats, free sugars and salt/sodium. At the same time, many people do not eat enough fruit, vegetables and other dietary fiber such as whole grains. Nutritious foods and beverages contribute to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight and adhering to a healthy lifestyle.

14. In order to promote consumer awareness of a healthy diet, enhancing their knowledge on foods which contribute to a healthy diet through availability of healthy foods in meeting environments is important. Providing guidance on nutrient contents that promote “healthfulness” through an easy-to-understand form of nutrition labelling will also ensure informed food choices. Simultaneously, meeting planners could ensure that caterers/kitchens follow basic food safety practices to minimize the risk of foodborne illness. In this regard, WHO’s “Five keys to safer foods” could be used as a basic guide.\(^3\)

### Environmental sustainability

15. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goal agenda encourages sustainable consumption and production, which includes reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse. The use and disposal of materials such as plastics, in particular single-use plastics, pose a threat to the health of the environment, with many countries now implementing strategies to reduce such waste.

16. Therefore, consideration could be given to actions such as avoiding use of plastic materials including decorations, reusable food service items, eliminating food waste and reducing paper waste. Environmental sustainability also involves the minimum use of transport. The travel restrictions enforced to contain the COVID-19 pandemic by most Member States and developments in information technology have changed the way that meetings are organized. Investing and promoting technological alternatives over face-to-face meetings is an opportunity to reduce travel.

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Physical activity

17. Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and treat NCDs such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers. It also helps to prevent overweight and obesity and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being. Estimates from both high-income, as well as low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), indicate that between 1–3% of national health care expenditures are attributable to physical inactivity.\(^9\) All forms of physical activity can provide health benefits if undertaken regularly and are of sufficient duration and intensity. The Global Action Plan for Physical Activity (GAPPA) 2020 also states that adults can be physically active and less sedentary at work.\(^10\) The updated WHO 2020 guidelines on activity and sedentary behaviour introduces the new concept of “every move counts”, which broadens the opportunity for being physically active.\(^11\) Thus, introducing and creating an enabling environment for physical activity during meetings would serve to improve physical activity of participants.

Tobacco

18. Tobacco claims the lives of 1.6 million people annually in the South-East Asia Region, and also affects non-smokers who are exposed to tobacco smoke. Use of various forms of tobacco is highly prevalent in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Tobacco is also a major risk factor for leading noncommunicable diseases (NCD) including cancers, cardiovascular diseases, chronic lung diseases and diabetes mellitus.

19. Smoking and other forms of tobacco use in the workplace raises operational costs and reduces productivity by adversely affecting the health of workers. Making workplaces, including meetings and events, tobacco-free is likely to protect the health of employees, as well as act as a promotional measure to prevent tobacco use. Article 8 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control defines a “workplace” as “any place used by people during their employment or work”.\(^12\) Under this definition, meeting venues are included.

Conclusion

20. In order to promote further action and uptake on organizing and conducting healthier meetings in the WHO South-East Asia Region, Thailand proposed a Decision on “Promoting healthier meetings in the South-East Asia Region” along with an Annexure describing a set of actions to promote healthy meetings. The decision and the Annexure were submitted to the High-Level Preparatory Meeting for discussions and its further submission to the Seventy-fourth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia.

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21. This background paper includes the relevant aspects from WHO’s 2019 publication *A guide to planning healthy meetings* and those from the paper presented by Thailand, and provides comprehensive information on promoting healthy meetings. While evidence-based directions and guidance based on evidence are not available for the actions promoting the planning of healthy meetings and it is unlikely that measurable outcomes can be defined, healthy meetings are likely to serve as a promotional movement for healthier lifestyles.

22. The Secretariat has prepared a revision of the 2019 WHO Guide to planning healthy meetings, including additional elements from the document provided by Thailand. The additional areas included are on greater utilization of virtual platforms for meetings in the post-pandemic setting, minimizing risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection and avoiding harmful use of alcohol.

23. The draft “*Guide to healthy meetings in the WHO South-East Asia Region*” is annexed herein. The draft Guide is expected to support the WHO Secretariat and Member States to raise awareness among event and meeting organizers and their participants about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including during meetings, and cultivate social norms around healthier choices and behaviours.
Annexure 1

A guide to healthy meetings
Contents

Overview ............................................................................................................................................ 9

1. Background ...................................................................................................................................... 10
   1.1. Why a healthy meeting? ......................................................................................................... 10
   1.2. The purpose of the guide ..................................................................................................... 11
   1.3. Target audience of the guide ............................................................................................... 11

2. Healthy meeting recommendations .............................................................................................. 11
   2.1. Tobacco-free environment ..................................................................................................... 11
   2.2. Alcohol-free meetings and events ........................................................................................ 12
   2.3. Promoting physical activity and addressing sedentary lifestyles during meetings and events ......................................................................................................................... 12
   2.4. Providing healthy food and beverages and ensuring food safety ....................................... 15
   2.5. Promoting mental health ..................................................................................................... 17
   2.6. Environmental sustainability ............................................................................................... 18

3. Healthy meeting and the COVID-19 pandemic ........................................................................... 19
   Annex 1: Checklist for healthy meetings ...................................................................................... 20
   Annex 2: Physical activity suggestions for meetings ...................................................................... 22
   Annex 3: Options for meeting meals – healthy recipes .............................................................. 24
   References ...................................................................................................................................... 27
Overview

A substantial proportion of the population from a wide variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds spend most of their days in workplaces. They are a suitable setting for introducing preventive actions to reduce the risk of lifestyle-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Meetings and events make up a significant part of the working day of individuals who work in office settings. Promoting and supporting healthy behaviours at meetings is one of many strategic approaches to advocate for and support workplace health.

This document summarizes key aspects to consider while planning and holding meetings to gain maximally in terms of public and planetary health. This guide also provides several easy-to-incorporate practices and recommendations to make meetings more sustainable and promote health and well-being. Examples of healthy menu choices, physical activity ideas and quick checklists have also been provided.
1. Background

1.1. Why a healthy meeting?

Meetings and events are a powerful and fundamental part of the working culture at the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia and in many workplaces globally. They function as a tool to communicate, make decisions, create solutions and strengthen relationships between colleagues. Meetings and events take up a significant amount of time during working days, and they can last for hours or days and can have substantial health impacts on the participants. For example, an extended period of seating time can increase sedentary behaviour or snacking and eating with high sugar and fat content that may be served may disrupt healthy diets. Therefore, promoting a healthy meeting is a crucial part of improving health outcomes in working-age adults.\( ^{1,4} \)

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been advocating the importance of health promotion in the workplace. In 2018, WHO joined with partners and the public from Geneva and worldwide to stage an event “Walk the Talk: The Health for All Challenge” during the Seventy-first World Health Assembly.\(^ {4} \) A similar event was conducted at the UN General Assembly in 2019, where Member States of the WHO South-East Asia (SEA) Region were actively involved in planning and coordinating the event. In the same year, the WHO Regional Office for Europe produced a manual to offer guidance and provide feasible examples of planning healthier meetings and events.\(^ {4} \) There is no clear definition of a healthy meeting. The guideline mentioned above produced by the WHO Regional Office for Europe states that a healthy meeting involves making healthy foods and beverages available, requiring a tobacco-free environment, encouraging physical activity to provide opportunities to create a culture of health and well-being, and minimize the impact on the environment. To date, this practical guide is the only available document by WHO to promote healthy meetings and events in the WHO workplace environment.

Member States of the SEA Region have been recognized as global health leaders, especially in the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). In addition, the Region played an active role in developing the Global action plan for physical activity 2018–2030\(^ {4,4} \) and monitoring the implementation of the WHO Global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.\(^ {4} \) Furthermore, the Regional Office has also been actively promoting a healthy workplace environment with a regional initiative such as Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle at the Workplace (“Be the Change” initiative).

Key strategies can be defined with the available information. Healthy meetings are likely to serve as a promotional movement for healthier lifestyles. In order to facilitate planning and execution of meetings where healthy lifestyles are advocated and practised, the WHO Regional Office presents an update to the 2019 document titled A guide to planning healthy meetings, which describes a set of actions to encourage healthy meetings. The updates are to consider greater utilization of virtual platforms for meetings in the post-pandemic setting, minimizing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 infection, mental health promotion, and avoiding the harmful use of alcohol. The goal of the document is to encourage the Regional Office and Member States to create a healthy lifestyle culture in the workplace, raise awareness among participants and cultivate social norms around healthier choices and behaviours, and provide information on planning healthy meetings. Implementing this guide can establish leadership and political commitment at the global and regional levels to promoting a healthy and active lifestyle in the workplace.
1.2. The purpose of the guide
This guide aims to provide principles for creating a culture of a healthy lifestyle at high-level meetings, technical meetings, and other events at the workplace environments of the Regional Office. It also aims to act as a framework for the Regional Office to display leadership in health promotion and be a role model. It can be used by Member States and other agencies wishing to promote healthy meetings, including health promotion initiatives. The goal is to encourage the Regional Office and Member States to create a healthy lifestyle culture in the workplace, raise awareness among participants, staff, and event organizers of the benefits of healthy diets and regular physical activity, and cultivate social norms around healthier choices and behaviours.

1.3. Target audience of the guide
This guideline is meant to be used by employees of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia and Member States of the Region. It can also be helpful for anyone tasked with planning a meeting or event in any type and level of workplace.

2. Healthy meeting recommendations
This guideline addresses six topics: tobacco-free environment, alcohol-free meetings and events, physical activity and non-sedentary lifestyle, healthy food and nutrition options, mental health and environmental sustainability.

2.1. Tobacco-free environment
The WHO SEA Region is among the largest producers and consumers of tobacco products. The Region was home to 237 100 tobacco users (226 300 males and 10 800 females) in 2018. It accounts for 1.6 million deaths annually – additionally, second-hand smoke accounts for up to one fifth of overall cardiovascular (CVD) deaths. Article 8 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control defines a “workplace” as “any place used by people during their employment or work”. Under this definition, a meeting venue is included. Hence, it is important that the meeting venue and the surrounding environment is tobacco-free.

**Actions**
- **Create 100% tobacco-free environments at the meeting venue and the surrounding environment.** Exposure of non-smokers to second-hand smoke cannot be controlled by air cleaning or mechanical air exchange. Ventilation and smoking areas, whether separately ventilated from non-smoking areas or not, do not reduce exposure to a safe level of risk and are not recommended. This recommendation also includes smokeless tobacco as well as electronic cigarettes or similar products.
- **Be a good role model.** Everyone can take a stand against smoking and set an example by not smoking and educate people around them.

**Tips**
- Provide a signage of “tobacco free” throughout the venue.
- Declare a tobacco-free policy at the start of the meeting.
2.2. Alcohol-free meetings and events
In 2016, the harmful use of alcohol resulted in some 3 million deaths worldwide and 132.6 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs). In recent years, there has been a gradual but significant increase in alcohol consumption among the general population of the Region. The Region also faces a high prevalence of heavy episodic drinking, or binge drinking. These have worsened the severity of alcohol-related problems such as NCDs, violence and road traffic injuries. The SAFER initiative recommends that everyone should be actively involved in strengthening restrictions on alcohol availability to protect people from the harmful use of alcohol. This includes limiting alcohol availability during meetings and events.

Actions
- **Do not offer alcohol during meetings, particularly those organized by WHO.** A substance with the potential to cause such extensive harm is not suitable for an organization dedicated to the promotion of public health or any institution with the desire to promote health. A healthy meeting should set an example of an alcohol-free environment to demonstrate leadership in promoting a healthy lifestyle and respecting the sociocultural differences of the meeting participants.
- **Support being a good role model.** Everyone can take a stand and set an example by not drinking alcoholic beverages during functions and educate people around.

Tips
- Provide a signage that alcohol will not be served during the meeting.
- Serve alcohol-free alternatives during receptions and celebrations.

2.3. Promoting physical activity and addressing sedentary lifestyles during meetings and events
Numerous health benefits are associated with regular physical activity, including lowering the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, improving cardiopulmonary and muscular fitness, reducing depression, and many benefits related to work performance and productivity of employees. Physical activity such as yoga and boxing has long been part of the Region’s culture due to its deep-rooted heritage. However, due to urbanization, people’s patterns of living have changed. The recently updated WHO 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour introduces the new concept of “every move counts”, which broadens the opportunity for being physically active at any number of movements.

Actions
- **Create opportunities for participants to move throughout the day, which is essential to stimulate physical activity and break sedentary behaviour.** The meeting should provide opportunities for participants to be physically active. Some detailed actions include the following:
o Organize regular physical activity breaks such as standing breaks, stretching, and moving breaks during the meeting, as appropriate. These breaks should be included in the meeting agenda (Table 1).

o Different types of meetings can provide various kinds of physical activity opportunities (Table 2). (More creative ideas for physical activity and sedentary breaks can be found in the Annex 2).

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13 According to the new 2020 guideline, there was insufficient evidence to provide a precise time limit on the amount of sedentary behaviour.
### Table 2.3.1. Breaks from sedentary behaviour

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<tr>
<th>Physical behaviour break</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| **Standing break**       | Stand up during the meeting to relieve physical discomfort due to a prolonged period of sitting. | • Stand up and move around the room for a few minutes or change chairs with someone else.  
• Ask participants to march on the spot and raise their arms for 30–60 seconds. |
| **Stretching break**     | Stretching the body helps to relax the body after long periods of sitting while also improving blood circulation and muscle flexibility. | • Encourage participants to stand up and stretch in place. |
| **Moving break**         | A moving break is a 5–10-minute group activity, often accompanied by music that encourages participants to do simple aerobic exercises. | • Stretching dance and moving around with traditional music (video examples can be found at [https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/physical-activity](https://www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/physical-activity)) |

### Table 2.3.2 Types of meetings and physical activity promotion

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<th>Types of meetings</th>
<th>Organizing tips for physical activity</th>
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| **Short–full day meeting** | • Consider one or two physical activity breaks during the meeting. These can be done before and after the meeting (see the example from Table 1 and Annex 2).  
• Organize active social activities during the meeting, such as ice breaking, networking sessions, or working in groups. |
| **Multi-day meeting** | Includes all the organizing tips from the short–full day meeting plus the following:  
• Schedule and promote physical activity sessions before the meeting.  
• Organize early morning physical activity opportunities such as yoga, jogging or walking. |
| **Virtual meeting** | Includes all the organizing tips from short–full day meeting plus the following:  
• Prepare a video on stretching and invite participants to follow it. |
• **Offer participants an environment conducive to being active.** A healthy meeting should have a surrounding environment that provides safe and appropriate opportunities to achieve the recommended 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. Some detailed recommendations include the following:
  - If possible, choose a venue or event location where participants can easily and safely take a walk and/or a meeting venue with a fitness facility.
  - Provide exercise stations or equipment in the hall or meeting room, for instance, a standing desk, mobile phone charging bikes, table tennis table, and exercise/resistance bands.

<table>
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<th>Tips</th>
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| • Participation in physical activity is voluntary with no pressure to join, culturally appropriate and sensitive to physical limitations, and is creative, safe and fun.  
• WHO recommends at least 150–300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week (or the equivalent vigorous activity) for all adults.  
• Promoting any movement and micro-exercise. “Every move counts” or physical activity of any type, and any duration can improve health and well-being; the more the better.  
• Advise participants to avoid prolonged sitting to prevent back pain and eye strain  
  o Sit with the back resting against the back of the chair and avoid leaning forward.  
  o If the viewing screen is perpendicular, turn the entire body and chair to view the screen (as opposed to turning just turning the neck).  
  o Avoid resting elbows, forearms or wrists on hard surfaces or sharp edges.  
  o Apply the 20-20-20 rule for eye breaks: every 20 minutes look 20 feet away and hold for 20 seconds.  
  o Walk around for a couple of minutes after every 60–90 minutes of sitting. |

### 2.4. Providing healthy food and beverages and ensuring food safety

Diet in countries of the WHO SEA Region consists primarily of rice and noodles. The distinctive feature of the South-East Asian diet is the abundance of fruits and vegetables, seafood, and herbs and spices. Healthy eating decreases the risk of chronic diseases. Rapid urbanization and changing lifestyles have led to a shift in dietary patterns with greater consumption of foods high in energy, fats, free sugars and salt/sodium. At the same time, many people do not eat enough fruit, vegetables and other dietary fiber such as whole grains. Providing a variety of healthy options and nutritional labelling are keys to promoting a healthy diet as an unhealthy diet can be driven by an unhealthy food environment. Nutritional labelling provides nutritional information that indicates the ingredients and helps participants in making healthier food choices and allows participants to eat healthily.

**Actions**

• **Assess whether the meeting requires food.** When organizing a meeting, assess the length of time, time of day and number of people attending the meeting before deciding whether food should be part of the work session.
• **Ensure that a variety of healthy options is provided throughout the event.** Ensure that healthier options are attractively presented, appealing, and taste good. They should be placed in prominent positions, where they are most likely to be seen and more likely to be chosen. Some detailed recommendations include the following:

**Fresh fruit and vegetables**
- Fresh fruit and vegetables should be the basis of any snacks provided and can also be the main component of starters, side dishes, and desserts.

**Fats and oils**
- Select foods that contain healthy sources of unsaturated fats and avoid foods that contain trans-fat.
- Opt for cooking methods that require less or no fat or oil, such as steaming, grilling or sautéing instead of fried foods.

**Whole grains**
- Offer whole-grain rice, bread, pasta, cereal or toast, bagels, fruit bread, muffins.

**Proteins**
- Choose lean protein such as fish, poultry, shellfish, or lean meat/low-fat protein option.
- Include plant-based sources of protein more often, such as beans and lentils, tofu, nuts, nut butter and beans.

**Desserts and sugar**
- As a preference, serve fresh fruit for dessert, and when other dessert options are chosen, serve in small portions and ensure that they are low in sugar and fats.
- Do not place candy or candy bowls in the meeting space.

**Salt**
- Choose products with a lower salt content and limit the use of processed foods.

**Beverages**
- Make water the default beverage available throughout the entire meeting, and avoid sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda, juices, flavoured milk and coffee, sweetened teas, sport and energy drinks.

• **Nutrition labelling**
- If possible, include nutrition labels for the food served. The format of the nutrition labels should be simple and easy to understand so that participants can make informed food choices.

• **Plan for special dietary requirements and other special demands**
- Provide various special dietary options for participants such as dairy-free, gluten-free, vegetarian and halal.

• **Ensure that caterers/kitchens follow food safety practices to minimize the risk of foodborne illnesses.** It is suggested to follow WHO’s *Five keys to safer food manual.*

**Tips**
- Taste is a key consideration. Ingredients such as herbs and spices can enhance taste and flavours, and reduce the use of salt, sugar, and fat.
- WHO’s recommendation for a healthy diet:
  - less than 25 g (6 teaspoons) of sugar per day
  - less than 5 g (just under a teaspoon) of salt per day
  - at least 400 g (5 portions) of fruit and vegetables per day.
2.5. **Promoting mental health**

Mental health problems are prevalent in all working populations around the world. It was estimated that 5% of working populations in high-income countries are affected by severe mental health problems, and 15% by moderate mental health problems.\(^{\text{xv}}\) Common mental health disorders reported in the workplace include stress, anxiety, and depression. Meetings that last for long hours can be one of the significant contributing factors to mental health disorders.

**Actions**

- **Value mental health and well-being as core assets when preparing to hold meetings and events.** Ensure that the meeting is promoting positive mental health and well-being for both the participants and organizers. Some detailed recommendations include the following:
  
  o Manage the meeting time following the planned schedule.
  o Assess whether the extra meeting hours are necessary and, if possible, these extended meeting hours should allow participants to have enough rest for conducting activities on the following day.
  o Allow appropriate short breaks during meetings combined with physical activity and other mindfulness sessions.
  o Provide facilities and arrange meeting times for ritual/religious use by participants such as a prayer room and a longer duration for Friday lunch.
  o Support breastfeeding by providing an appropriate space during the meeting.

- **Establish and implement firm policies and standards that respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms.**\(^{\text{xvi}}\) Organizers should have a policy in place regarding harassment, discrimination, and bullying during meetings and events. Some detailed recommendations are given below:
  
  o Provide a clear mechanism to report, investigate, and punish unacceptable and disruptive behaviours during meetings and events.
  o Promote professionalism, consideration, and respect for others during meetings and events.

- **Support being a good role model.** Everyone can take a stand and set an example by exercising responsible behaviours during functions and educate people around.

**Tips**

Looking after mental health in the workplace:

(1) Talk about feelings. (2) Keep active. (3) Eat well. (4) Do not smoke and drink alcohol. (5) Maintain communication with other people. (6) Request for help when feeling tired or overwhelmed. (7) Take a break. (8) Do something you are good at. (9) Accept who you are. (10) Care for others.
2.6. **Environmental sustainability**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has raised concern over the consumption of resources. The reduction of waste generation includes prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.\(^\text{xxi}\) Consideration of sustainability can help organizers minimize the negative impacts of the meeting on the environment. Communication with participants enables organizers to adopt environmentally friendly practices effectively. A healthy meeting should also consider minimizing the negative impacts on the environment.

**Actions**

- **Assess whether a face-to-face meeting is required.** Consider holding a meeting virtually, such as a teleconference or webinar to limit travel.
- **Ensure that the meeting location is accessible to all participants.** The meeting venue should be located such that it can be easily accessed by foot, bicycle or public transport.
- **If possible, choose a meeting location that implements environmentally friendly building principles.** The meeting venue should have energy-efficient and energy-saving policies, and advanced systems of waste collection and recycling.
- **Adopt environmentally friendly practices in planning and organizing the meeting.**

Some detailed recommendations are as follows:

- Avoid unnecessary printouts and distribute all meeting materials electronically before and during the meeting.
- Select foods and beverages that are locally produced and order them in bulk platters rather than single servings.
- Reconfirm the number of food items with the caterers to avoid wastage of food.
- Encourage reusable conference items such as mugs, water containers, washable serving containers, eating utensils, name tags, and stationery.
3. Healthy meeting and the COVID-19 pandemic

Moving forward towards the new normal in arranging healthy meetings

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting work-from-home and social distancing have led to significant changes in the way meetings and events are arranged. One of these changes includes the increased use of video conferencing as a means of communicating during work meetings. However, in places where restrictive public health and social measures are being progressively adjusted in response to an evolving epidemiology, the need for face-to-face meetings and events should be planned, operated, and evaluated based on thorough risk assessments. A healthy meeting should follow the available guidance aimed at decreasing the transmission of COVID-19.

Actions

- Whenever possible, consider holding a virtual meeting completely or at least partially, to avoid the risk of travelling and mass gatherings. Some detailed recommendations are given below.
  - Create a remote-friendly schedule: online workshops should be shorter than live workshops, and scheduled with adequate breaks and a mix of tasks.
  - Consider time zones when scheduling online meetings and workshops for a global team. Plan for optimal timings as far as possible.
  - Take regular breaks: breaks could be more frequent than in a face-to-face meeting.

- If a face-to-face meeting is required, the contexts in which the events take place should be examined. Key considerations include, but are not limited to:
  - the development of a preparedness and response plan aimed at reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission caused by the meeting as well as the likelihood of straining health services. The plan should include:
    - coordination and collaboration with all stakeholders, including event organizers, health authorities, and other relevant authorities;
    - assessment of available capacities and resources, including provision of human resources and procurement of equipment and other medical consumables, as well as isolation rooms and regular cleaning schedules of the venue.
  - Modifications at the meeting venue, facilities and equipment such as:
    - hosting the event outdoors rather than indoors and adjusting the official venue capacity to include physical distancing;
    - regulating the flow and density of people entering, attending, and leaving the meeting;
    - ensuring regular and thorough cleaning and disinfection of the venue by designated staff;
    - ensuring the availability of handwashing facilities with soap and water and/or hand sanitizer dispensers;
    - disseminating key messages on basic preventive measures, as well as actions and steps to be followed by people developing symptoms of COVID-19 during the meeting.
Annex 1

Checklist for healthy meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tobacco-free environment</th>
<th>Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have you ensured a tobacco-free environment in all areas linked to the meeting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Did you make sure that the no smoking policy be implemented/enforced?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol-free meetings and events</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have you ensured that there will be no alcohol served throughout the meeting, including at receptions and special side events?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promoting physical activity and addressing sedentary lifestyle during meetings and events</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is the venue or event location such that participants can easily and safely take a walk or is a fitness facility easily accessible?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will the dress code be appropriate for being physically active during the meeting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can the meeting or part of it be organized in a moving format?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have the participants’ accessibility needs been checked?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have enough breaks been incorporated into the agenda with opportunities for a variety of physical activities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have participants been advised to avoid sitting for long hours, as they could get back pain and eye strain?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Providing healthy food and beverages and ensuring food safety</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Does the menu include a variety of and healthy food choices?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are all food groups included in the menu?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do fruits and vegetables make up a good proportion of the menu?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are fruits and vegetables offered with every meal and snack break?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are whole grain products served with all the main meals?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have you ensured less use of saturated fat, salt and sugar in all foods that are on offer?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are all selected foods and beverages culturally appropriate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have you ensured that sauces, dressings, condiments are served on the side?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Is the food visually appealing and tasty?

- Have you ensured that fruits and vegetables are placed at the start of the buffet line?

- Have you made sure that the items that are offered for dessert are healthy and low in fat and sugar?

- Did you request for smaller plates?

- Have you requested the caterers to place nutritional information, including calorie count and serving size, next to the food being served?

- Was information on food allergies, dietary restrictions and special dietary needs requested prior to the meeting?

- Did you ensure that water is freely available?

- Is safe food handling practised at all times?

**Promoting mental health**

- Have you arranged the meeting agenda and discussion time properly to keep to the scheduled timings, including time for physical activity and prayers?

- Are meeting areas and facilities arranged for use of breastfeeding mothers and/or religious uses?

- Have you communicated a mechanism to address unacceptable or disruptive behaviours during the meeting?

**Environmental sustainability**

- Is the meeting location accessible to all participants?

- Have you ensured that plastic and other non-biodegradable items are avoided?

- Have you arranged for an appropriate system of waste collection and proper disposal?

- Are reusable washable serving containers and utensils being used?

- Are all utensils made out of recyclable or compostable material?

- Have you ensured minimize use of paper and printing?

- If paper is used, is recyclable paper used and printed on both sides in adequate numbers for sharing?
Annex 2

Physical activity suggestions for meetings

Tips for virtual meetings

- If a 60-minute meeting is being thought of, consider scheduling it for 50 minutes instead. This gives participants 5–10 min to transition between any additional virtual meetings they may have. If the meeting is scheduled for 30 min, make it 25 min.
- In order to optimize participants’ ability to pay attention effectively, schedule breaks (5–10 min) every 45–60 min.
- Slow down the pace of the meetings. The normal pace of in-person meetings is likely to be too fast for Zoom meetings. Try to create pauses throughout the meeting to slow it down.
- Make meetings interactive by using functions such as raise hand, Q&A, polling and breakout rooms. Just listening to someone speak for the entire meeting is very difficult for human attention, but even more so on Zoom.
- Be mindful of how much screen time is expected for participants to engage in each day. Extended screen time is fatiguing and leads to inattentiveness, errors, unhealthy eyes and body strain.
- Consider giving participants the option to decide whether to have their cameras on or off. Off-camera time can be an effective way to manage screen fatigue.
- During the first couple of minutes of the meeting, invite participants to check in with themselves by lowering their gaze, taking a deep breath, and being silent.
- Take some time to connect with meeting participants. Check in with coworkers at the start of the meeting and say hello or ask them non-work-related questions.
- Schedule in moments of reflection throughout meetings – perhaps between speakers/topics. Give people 1–2 min to consolidate their thoughts about the material that was covered thus far.
- At the end of the meeting, review and summarize what was accomplished and reaffirm what needs to be done before the next meeting.
- Stick to the schedule: start on time and end on time.
- If the meeting is longer than 60 min, ensure a stretch break in the agenda.
- Schedule a move and stretch break for 1–2 min for every hour of sitting time. Select a couple of different stretches to do during the move break. Insert a slide into the PowerPoint deck as a reminder.
- Make it clear that walking, standing and stretching during the meeting is allowed and even encouraged at the start of the meeting. Standing/walking discussions during group activities can also be included for in-person meetings.
- Deep breathing breaks are best suited to the beginning and end of the meeting day.
- Stretching breaks should be taken while seated or standing.
- Encourage attendees to stand, stretch or move around within the meeting room as needed, and inform them of the flexibility to do so at the start of the meeting.
• Consider an activity based on step count using the smart phone pedometer and set an informal target for participants to reach.

• Organize a stair climb.

Some easy-to-incorporate physical exercises during the meetings

• **Simple chair exercise** suggestions that can be done by anyone is suited for short meetings but can be tried at longer meetings too and are particularly useful for differently abled individuals.

• **Arms to the ceiling stretch** – stretch the arms up with the fingers of both hands interlocked and palms pointing upwards. Hold in this position for 10 seconds. Then lean to your right in a curve till you feel the stretch along the left side of your torso. Come back to the neutral position. Repeat the same movement to the left. Repeat 10 times.

• **Shoulder and upper arm stretch** – extend the right arm straight in front of you. Grab the elbow of the extended hand with the left hand and pull it across the chest till you feel the shoulder and upper back muscles stretch maximally. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat with the other arm.

• **Spinal twist** – cross the legs, right over left. Slowly twist the body rightwards to back of the chair. Hold for 15 seconds. Slowly turn back to face forward. Repeat the movement in the opposite direction. Repeat the exercise 10 times.

• **Leg extensions** – grab the seat of your chair, steady yourself and extend your legs parallel to the floor. Flex and point the toes towards the body. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 10 times.
Annex 3
Options for meeting meals – healthy recipes

Mini snacks and finger foods
- Snacks should be improvised using local recipes and foods. Adding vegetables, fruit, fish or chicken to rice-, noodle- or flour-based foods and served in small portions can create imaginative and healthy snack options.
- Local pickles and chutneys can be used with reduced salt to increase the taste and variety of the meals. The liberal use of herbs and spices also helps to improve taste in a low-fat, low-salt context.
- Imaginative presentation can help reduce negative bias in the consumer.

A great variety of regional breads exist, which can be the base for snacks with healthy toppings or fillings.
- Mini versions of whole wheat breads, chapati, naan, roti, and paratha breads can be used in the style of wraps or pitta pockets, which can be filled with boiled or lightly sautéed vegetables, low-fat cheeses, and low-salt pickles and nuts.
- Mini breads such as pizza, chapati, paratha, roti, roshi, naan or crackers can be used with vegetable, chicken, or fish toppings.
- Soft fermented breads such as uttapam, palappam and hoppers can be used as a base for toppings using vegetables, fresh onions, tomato, cucumber and green chillies.
- Pancakes or soft fermented breads such as dosai can be utilized for wraps with healthy fillings.
- Sandwiches should use multigrain or brown bread whenever possible, and have a greater proportion of vegetables to bread.

Fillings and toppings
- Fillings – modify traditional recipes to replace starchy roots with other vegetables. Use healthy salad options such as batar da’an (pumpkin, corn, mungbean mix), aalu achar (potato salad), bodi koa char (boiled bean salad).
- Suggested toppings: gado gado (lotek), mango and coriander salad, pineapple and celery salad, tofu pan fried with vegetables and peanut sauce, bean sprouts and vegetable mix, som tam (papaya salad), green mango salad, mas huni or kulhiboakibaa (tuna cake, coconut spice mix), laphet thohk (green tea salad).
- Include herbs/nuts wherever possible in the preparation of fillings and marinades.
- Use mustard paste instead of butter or low-fat mayonnaise or avocado spread on breads.
- Herbs, spices, tomato-based sambal, ezays, kimchi (with less salt), budu (fermented seafood), ikan bilis, ikan sabuko and pickles with less oil and salt can be added to fillings and toppings in small amounts to enhance taste.
- Small amounts of chutney or pickles can be added to improve taste in fillings, e.g. corn, chutney with coriander.
Rice or rice flour items

- Rice flour or wheat flour dumplings such as momos, which are filled with vegetables, fish or chicken and other lean meats are healthy.
- Sticky rice-based small items as regionally appropriate may be filled with vegetables/fish/chicken. The use of seaweed is common in some countries. Budu tasi (seaweed salad) can be served as an accompaniment. Minimize the use of soy sauce on the side.
- Rice or rice noodles with mixed vegetables can be offered in small snack-sized servings.

Vegetable dishes served in small portions as snacks

- Many varieties of chaat can be made, e.g. chaat prepared with peanuts or chickpea or mung or lentil or broccoli with onion, tomato, chaat masala, lemon and coriander served in small portions.
- Most hollow vegetables (chillies, capsicum, brinjal, tomato) may be stuffed with a mixture of seasoned, vegetable/nut/dried fruit fillings and served raw or grilled, but not battered or fried.
- Barbecued vegetables and yams, including sweet potatoes, can be served with pureed fruit and nut marinades or sauces.
- Baked items using gram flour – most of the regionally available pulses can be ground to produce gram flour of different flavours. These can be mixed or used separately and made into small balls with vegetables.
- Potato or yam balls mixed with herbs and gram flour as well as other snacks such as fish balls or samosa can be baked rather than deep fried.
- Salads with low-fat dressings and herbs can also be served in small portions.
- Lightly salted or unsalted nuts can also be served.

Dairy products

- Provide low-fat yoghurt or curd with fruit and nuts.

Breakfast ideas

Serve varieties of fruit and vegetables with no added sugar, whole grain foods and low-fat dairy products. If serving fish or meats, they should be cooked using less oil, and the use of either low salt sauces or less salt should be encouraged. When serving eggs, scrambled eggs or omelets can be mixed with vegetables.

Food options

- Salads with low fat and low salt dressing. Local yoghurts, curd (low fat or with the fat layer removed) and cottage cheese in place of dressings.
- Fruit pulp, fruit conserve (low sugar) instead of jams. Peanut butter and low fat local cheeses are other options.
- Muesli/bran-based cereals with fruit and low-fat yoghurt.
• Whole grain breads, rice, noodles, pasta with vegetables, chicken- or fish-based side dishes.
• Fried rice, noodles or pasta, with extra vegetables.
• Steamed rice and curries cooked with reduced fat/cream/coconut milk.
• Fermented breads such as dosai, uttapam, hoppers, idli are healthy. Flatbreads such as chapati, paratha and naan prepared with whole wheat flour. The accompanying dishes should have less oil and more vegetables and herbs. Add other vegetables to potato dishes. Add vegetables to paneer bhurji (grated panner).
• Masala idli stuffed with vegetables. Uttapam with added oats and vegetables. Thalipeeth (multigrain bread), lauki thepla (breads) with added vegetables.
• Paratha and dosa filled with vegetables other than potatoes and served with non-fat raita.
• Rice flour or wheat flour dumplings (mamos) with vegetable, fish or lean meat fillings.
• Natural fruit juices, such as king coconut water or vegetable juice without added sugar and unsweetened tea/coffee.

**Healthy lunch/dinner options**

• Soups with reduced fat and no cream (milk or cornflour thickening is possible) or clear soups with dumplings such as momos.
• Vegetable slices.
• Pre-made salads with low fat and low salt dressing. Local yoghurts, curd and cottage cheese can replace commercial dressings.
• Whole grain brown rice, whole-meal noodles and pasta.
• Fried rice, noodles or pasta with extra vegetables.
• Brown or whole grain rice with accompanying curries, e.g. chickpea, lentil or mixed vegetable curry cooked with minimum amounts of fat/cream/ghee/coconut milk.
• Whole meal or multigrain regional breads, roti or wraps can be offered.
• Fish is a better choice than meats. Use local varieties and local cooking methods that use less oil. Grilled, steamed, baked, boiled or broiled are preferred cooking methods for fish. Encourage the use of healthy marinades.
• Lean poultry over red meats or processed meats can be prepared using healthy cooking methods. Add fruits, nuts and herbs in marinades and sauces.
• Modified chutneys and pickles that are low in sugar, salt and fat can be used for enhancing taste.
• Local fresh fruits without added sugar.
• Dessert options would be to use thick fruit toppings on thin pastry or cake bases that can be lightly baked. Small amounts of cottage, low fat cheeses or spreads may be used. Low fat or no fat yoghurt and fruit yoghurt also serve as viable options.
References


