

Reducing Sodium and Added Sugars at a Large Food Service Management Company

To learn more about how food service management companies (FSMCs) are improving the nutritional quality of food served and sold across a variety of settings, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) interviewed national and regional FSMCs across the United States. ASTHO then developed company snapshots that highlight different approaches food service operators are using to reduce sodium and added sugar in their food offerings. These snapshots can help public health leaders and practitioners learn more about the range of FSMC nutrition initiatives, identify common goals across public health entities and the private sector, and consider opportunities for aligning efforts.

Sodexo USA: A National Company Snapshot

[Sodexo USA](#) serves roughly 75 million consumers in 80 countries, with 15 million consumers at 9,000 sites in North America alone. Sodexo has roughly \$9.2 billion in revenue, over 130,000 employees, and is the largest employer of registered dietitians in the United States. It [serves](#) healthcare settings, government services, schools K-12, colleges, sports and leisure entities, businesses and corporations, senior living facilities, military, federal agencies, the Department of Defense, and intelligence agencies.

The company's commitment to strengthening the nutritional quality of foods began in 2006 with its [Better Tomorrow Plan](#). This commitment led to Sodexo convening culinary, nutrition, and supply management leaders to develop action plans aimed at lowering sugar, salt, and fat in its ingredients, recipes, and menus. Overall, Sodexo's strategy aligns with Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations. To adapt to changes in the nutrition landscape and achieve its goals, the company draws on the expertise of its internal insights teams and external partners.

Mindful Nutrition Standards

	PLATES <small>(contain at least 1 serving from each: protein starch, veg/fruit)</small>	ENTREES <small>(i.e.: center plate protein, pizza, sandwiches, grill items, entire salads without protein or starch)</small>	SIDES <small>(i.e.: side salad)</small>	SOUPS <small>(if any)</small>	DESSERTS/SNACKS <small>(Most all of the criteria down this column OR 4 of the criteria AND must have at least 10% of the Daily Value of one or more major nutrients, such as Vitamin A, C, E, Iron, Calcium or Potassium)</small>
CALORIES	less than or equal to 600	less than or equal to 550	less than or equal to 225	less than or equal to 225	less than or equal to 200
TOTAL FAT	less than or equal to 35% <small>of calories from fat OR less than or equal to 15g</small>	less than or equal to 35% <small>of calories from fat OR less than or equal to 15g</small>	less than or equal to 35% <small>of calories from fat OR less than or equal to 8g</small>	less than or equal to 35% <small>of calories from fat OR less than or equal to 8g</small>	less than or equal to 35% <small>of calories from fat OR less than or equal to 8g</small>
SATURATED FAT	less than or equal to 10% <small>of calories from fat</small>	less than or equal to 10% <small>of calories from fat</small>	less than or equal to 10% <small>of calories from fat</small>	less than or equal to 10% <small>of calories from fat</small>	less than or equal to 10% <small>of calories from fat</small>
TRANS. FAT	FREE! <small>(less than 0.5g)</small>	FREE! <small>(less than 0.5g)</small>	FREE! <small>(less than 0.5g)</small>	FREE! <small>(less than 0.5g)</small>	FREE! <small>(less than 0.5g)</small>
CHOLESTEROL	less than or equal to 100mg	less than or equal to 100mg	less than or equal to 5mg	less than or equal to 25mg	less than or equal to 20mg
SODIUM	less than or equal to 800mg	less than or equal to 700mg	less than or equal to 300mg	less than or equal to 700mg	less than or equal to 300mg
OTHER	more than or equal to 3g Fiber				more than or equal to 3g Fiber

Sodexo's Wellness Program

Sodexo's wellness program, [Mindful](#), has helped the company achieve significant nutrition improvements. Launched in 2013, it [eliminated](#) an estimated five tons of salt and 14 tons of sugar from consumers' diets in its first year. The program is now in 2,000 school accounts across the United States, where it promotes healthy eating, active lifestyles, and community.

From the healthy eating lens, Mindful focuses primarily on meals as a whole rather than individual meal components. The program draws from national nutrition guidelines, including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and American Heart Association recommendations. Additionally, focusing on "mindful messaging" in the menus helps drive down sodium levels. For example, promoting whole grains, fruits, and vegetables helps limit sodium consumption. Although Mindful focuses on the entire meal, there are sodium standards for entrees (less than or equal to 700 mg of sodium) and sides (less than or equal to 300 mg of sodium).



Progress on Reducing Sodium

The Mindful program has enabled Sodexo to make great strides on sodium reduction. However, some food products are easier to address than others. Sodexo was able to significantly reduce the sodium content in its tomato-based products, but other products, such as grains and salad dressings, can be more challenging. For example, removing sodium in bread products can impact how well bread rises. Sodium reduction also affects food preservation, which can impact shelf life, transportability, and price.

FSMCs often face another challenge as they try to change to healthier ingredients and products: demand, or order volume. If a food service account is placing a small order for a product, it may not meet minimum order requirements, which can result in challenges fulfilling the order. For example, there are select low sodium products that require smaller orders; in some cases, this relatively small number of units ordered fails to meet volume requirements and the order can't be completed. To avoid this situation, Sodexo has worked closely with its food-manufacturing partners to create healthier ingredients and recipes that are then used across the United States. This helps increase demand for healthier products, resulting in fewer issues fulfilling orders.

Part of Sodexo's success in creating healthier menu items can be attributed to the fact that it maintains supply management teams that are dedicated to specific product lines. These teams identify where and how sodium content can be controlled, and ensure that the company is achieving its nutrition goals and delivering appealing meals to consumers.

Sodexo continues to evaluate broader questions around sodium, such as:

- What amount of sodium reduction is enough?
- When does a food no longer become recognizable to the customer? When is food quality jeopardized?
- How do we achieve more scratch cooking when society demands food at lightning speed?

Multiple Standards Guide Sodexo's Nutrition Efforts

In addition to Sodexo's internal nutrition commitments, it often must meet other entities' regulatory requirements. For example, if Sodexo is managing a General Services Administration contract, foods and beverages must meet the [federal concession guidelines](#). If it's for the [Department of Defense](#) or another federal retail space, there are different sets of guidelines. In some cases, the guidelines may be determined by standards in a request for proposals (RFP). K-12 accounts require adherence to the nutrition standards that went into effect with the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act. In some of its corporate dining venues, Sodexo may find that a particular state has distinct nutrition requirements for food retail locations. Contracts in California or New York may be more stringent compared to other states. Regardless of these variations, all Sodexo accounts offer mindful food options.



Sodexo's Nutrition Goals

Some of Sodexo's goals include:

- Implementing a healthy dining program in 95 percent of food service accounts in key markets by 2017.
- Providing at least 30 percent healthier options in 45 percent of vending accounts by 2018.
- Implementing a healthier children's meal in 40 percent of food service accounts at cultural destinations by 2015. This includes a default fruit or vegetable side and default water or low-fat milk beverage.
- Implementing the Partnership for a Healthier America [Hospital Healthier Food Initiative](#) in 20 percent of accounts by 2018.
- Implementing the [Smarter Lunchrooms Movement](#) in K-12 schools across North America.

Partnering with the Culinary Institute of America

The Culinary Institute of America (CIA) has been pivotal in bringing companies together to discuss menu items, recipes, and food innovations. It has helped drive change not only for Sodexo, but a range of FSMCs, food entrepreneurs, and food manufacturers. Collaborating with CIA has significantly increased the level of engagement across the supply chain, from suppliers to corporate leadership.

Working in tandem across sectors has helped companies offer healthy foods at the right price point.

Sodexo participates as an Operator Member within The Healthy Menus Research and Development (R & D) Collaborative as well as an Operator Member within The Healthy Kids Collaborative. A focused presentation around blending mushrooms with protein at The Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative created the genesis for the mushroom blend burger Sodexo is now serving in K-12 schools. The company leans on CIA to guide thought leadership that impacts Sodexo development projects with vendors around creating non-proprietary cleaner, healthier products.

Providing Technical Expertise

Sodexo staff has worked with federal agencies and others to craft RFP language with nutrition standards that are attainable and meet specific guidelines. Sometimes RFPs are written in such a way that there are few, if any, options. Sodexo provides guidance on how to translate its nutrition criteria for each type of dish into language that guides food purchasing.



Key Takeaways

- **Focus on mindful eating.** Although there are specific nutrition criteria, the emphasis is on the nutritional quality of the meal as a whole.
- **Create demand for healthier ingredients.** Increased demand for lower-sodium foods helps sustain availability of these items.
- **Engage food manufacturers.** Working with food manufacturers is necessary to drive change at the ingredient level. A healthier meal requires more nutritious ingredients.
- **Team up.** Organizations like the Partnership for a Healthier America and CIA are instrumental to setting nutrition goals and increasing FSMC engagement on healthy menu development.

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