

Healthy Vending Snacks on the rise

Americans spend \$21 billion a year on vending machine snacks. Picture this person, gazing across rows upon rows of brightly coloured packaging, rummaging through their pockets to find the right change for the vending machine to gorge on the chocolate bar they so desperately need.

Located in the back of offices and schools they sit and wait for those weakened by hunger to come, change jingling in their pockets. Vending machines typically offer snacks that would give most nutritionists a migraine. Not only are most the snacks unhealthy, they are also frequently obscure variations of known brands, the forgotten remainders of a failed product launch that no one will ever eat. In essence, many vending machines are where candy goes to die, a carb-loaded elephant burial ground.

To be sure, vending machines have changed a lot since the days of the automats, when Jazz Age eateries like Horn & Hardart would dispense a slab of meatloaf or a hot apple pie through a slot in exchange for a nickel or two. Today, however, instead of meals, most vending machines deal in quick fixes; sodas, candy bars and snack foods intended to quiet a rumbling stomach, not take the place of actual nutrition.

The problem is that, to many people, the vending machine is as much a part of their daily diet as fast food joints. According to the National Automatic Merchandising Association, in 2004, Americans spent more than \$21 billion buying food and beverages from the vending machines. The average American works about eight to ten hours a day and, according to food-services giant Aramark about 15 percent of workers don't even have time to take a lunch break. For them, the vending machine is a straight shot down the hall, and the snacks inside it are usually fattening and not so healthy — that is until recently.

Partly in response to pressure from parent groups, customers and the health-care industry, vending business companies such as Klix are now beginning to offer drinks that may pose less danger to the heart, arteries and waistline.

As most students and office workers know, making healthy choices is a difficult task, especially when hungry. A morning spent in meetings and hours at the computer make a Mars Bar hard to avoid. For those office workers who don't have time to head to a restaurant for lunch or are working late, vending machines are their saviour.

In January 2005, the National Automatic Merchandising Association started a million-dollar campaign called "Balanced for Life." It highlights the need for a balanced diet and fitness focusing on nutrition in the workplace where vending sales are highest. According to NAMA, a large part of the campaign is to encourage vending and snack food leaders to develop healthier choices, which, so far, seems to be working and needs to continue.

However, even if there are healthier choices in vending machines, it is very easy to fall victim to a sugar craving. These lapses in judgement are why Dr. Kathy James at the University of San Diego recommends to try not to skip meals, and if you need small snacks, choose peanuts or yogurt. "If you go to a machine and get a candy bar, it makes you quickly energetic, but an hour later you feel slumpy again."

About the Author

By Morgan Shaw, a health and fitness guru with an interest in [vending machines](#) and [vending business](#).

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