

# Health in Belgium: Employees Want More Healthy Alternatives in the Workplace

January 29, 2018 | by Alberts

***50% of Belgian employees would choose different snacks if more healthy alternatives were available at work. Here are the facts and how you can take action.***

We all know the saying: *an apple a day keeps the doctor away*. Still obesity numbers seem to be on the rise. How does that make sense when studies show that more than half of Belgian employees (that is 69%) consumes at least one healthy snack a day? It seems that Belgian employees are actually ready to adopt a healthy lifestyle... if only more healthy alternatives would be available in the workplace. So maybe we should start with putting these numbers in the right context.

## Positive mentality change

In the summer of 2016, the Belgian organization Gezinsbond presented the results from a survey with 2,000 Belgian families that looked into the local eating habits and lifestyle. It turns out that Belgian families are actually taking conscious action to live healthier.

Especially in terms of being active and consuming healthy nutrition.

Congrats! 96% of Belgian families cook at home almost every day. Keep it up!

60% of the participants in the survey also claimed to check the nutritional value of the food they bought (eg. calories) – good thinking!

## Lack of healthy alternatives in the workplace

According to another study by Belgian market research agency Vox-i from 2014:

- 48% of Belgian employees snacks both in the morning and afternoon on a working day.
- 69% makes it at least one healthy snack.
- 55% of Belgian employees would go for healthier snacks in the office if only more options would be available.

How clear does the signal have to be, you business leaders?!

(Oh, and then there's the 56% of Belgian employees that would still prefer a sugary snack over a healthy one. Ah well...)

Compared to the current variety offered in the average workplace, we can conclude that not many healthy alternatives are available. And certainly, no options that are tailored to each and everyone's personal needs and taste. Yes, many offices get a weekly or even daily fruit basket delivery. But, honestly... do you like peeling an orange while you are replying to emails or talking on the phone with your client?

## Companies don't take enough responsibility (yet!)

Website [www.gezondleven.be](http://www.gezondleven.be) performs a [three-yearly study](#) (last one in 2016) which showed that 30% of companies in Flanders and Brussels does not have a health program in place.

The number of initiatives that are being carried out today is higher than in 2012, but that is mostly thanks to new government regulations. The truth is that "food" is not enough on the agenda of Belgian companies and organizations. Partly this is because there is a lack of awareness of the negative effects of unhealthy eating patterns of their employees. Company leaders still believe the initiative should be taken in the private life of the employee. However, we saw in [our latest article](#) that your human capital is your business' greatest asset. Taking good care of your people will positively impact your organization's ROI.

## Healthy snacks should be affordable and accessible

To be able to do better, Belgians think that the responsibility to live healthier is shared with the educational system, the government, marketing/media and their employers.

Let's make it very simple.

Belgians believe that making healthy choices should be logical and straightforward, but for that to happen:

- it should be clearer **what "healthy" means** (what is healthy today can be life threatening tomorrow, so how do you keep up?)
- healthy food should become more **affordable** (quite frankly it can get expensive to cook daily meals with only healthy ingredients, especially compared to processed food, don't you think so?)
- healthy food should be more **accessible** (like, where can you find it quick and easy?)

Without these parameters, can you be blamed for grabbing a quick (and quite often not so healthy) snack in between meals?

Vlaams Instituut Gezond Leven suggests that caterers and suppliers make arrangements with companies to provide a wider variety of healthy products. However, it is often profitability (eg. of vending machines) that is key to companies. The quickest, cheapest fix is often preferred, which is only logical. And the more a product sells the more it will be available. And to date, the winners remain the unhealthy, sugary snacks.

## Why not take the easy route?

We realized a few years ago that, if we want to improve society's eating habits, we should make it easy for people to change their lifestyle. Changing everyone's full meal plan seemed too far a stretch. So we started with snacking.

For most humans, 25% of the daily food intake consists of snacks. Taking just Millennials, for example, we see this percentage go up even more. It's not just that they prefer personalized food items that are fresh and creative. More and more they tend to consume snacks as meal replacements (we are talking about a tendency of 35%).

Alberts developed a Smoothie Station that mixes a personalized, healthy, smoothie in under 90 seconds. The Alberts Station is an easy way for companies to give employees that healthy alternative they crave for: a quick, tasty, *healthy* snack tailored to each individual's taste and needs.

But beware, not all smoothies are healthy. It all depends on the ingredients. We use only frozen chunks of fruit and veggies, to guarantee full nutritional value. Only water is added. We don't use sugar, food colorings or other nonsense. Just like the machine, we are transparent about the blending process.

Who said healthy needs to be dull? Bring a pop of color into your workday with a healthy smoothie!