A number of recent studies have examined how cafeteria redesigns get diners to eat better at work. They’ve found that simply having healthier food available for sale doesn’t always mean even the most health-conscious consumers will buy them. Many hungry diners make purchasing decisions based on what catches their eye or what daily deal they’re told about as soon they walk into a food service area. Product placement promotion and price can prove just as important as nutritional value, according to behavioral economics, which examines the psychology and emotional factors behind consumer decisions. The American Heart Association worked with Noridian Mutual Insurance Company in Fargo, North Dakota, to improve the selection of healthier food and beverages in worksite cafeterias and on in-house catering menus. In addition (Or in combination with), they used psychological strategies like moving healthy snacks to high-traffic areas and found they provided just the right nudge to get people to make wiser eating choices.

The Challenge
North Dakota now has the 17th highest adult obesity rate in the nation, according to the 2016 The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America. North Dakota’s adult obesity rate is currently 31.0 percent, up from 20.5 percent in 2000 and 11.6 percent in 1990. About 39 percent of adults in the state say they eat fruit less than once a day, and 27 percent consume vegetables that infrequently. A poor diet is a leading contributor to serious health conditions including diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease. With adults employed full time in the U.S. report working an average of 47 hours per week, worksites interventions have significant potential to improve dietary habits.

“Since we moved the fresh fruit to the cash register, we have to fill the bowl twice every day, which is about double what we were doing before!”
– Paula Selzler, former general manager for Sodexo, Noridian’s food service contractor
The American Heart Association's Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships team worked closely with wellness leaders at Noridian Mutual Insurance Company. Together they formed a task force aimed at improving healthy food and beverage choices in all food service areas. ANCHOR collected data analyzing catering menus and surveyed cafeteria products, their prices, placement and how they were promoted. Together with the food service contract company food service manager, they made changes in the cafeterias, such as moving fruits, vegetables and other healthy snacks that had previously been placed in corners or on lower levels of shelves into high-trafficked areas with much better visibility. They also adjusted the menus of boxed lunches available through catering services to reflect reduced portion sizes of wraps and desserts, and include more fruit and healthier snacks, as well as more options for low-sugar beverages.

Sustaining Success
Noridian wellness leaders and food service manager will continue overseeing the inclusion of healthier food in catered meals and ensuring that the more nutritious options in the cafeterias have optimal placement. They also will start working with company administration on implementing a healthy meeting policy.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
The cafeteria environment was altered to help encourage consumers make healthier food and beverage choices during their visits. Physically changing the location of the fruit basket resulted in a tremendous sales boost to those items, while the catering menu was updated to include, more fruits and vegetables, fewer sugary drinks, and smaller portions of entrees, sandwiches and wraps.

Results
Office managers at Noridian Mutual Insurance Company now order boxed lunches for department meeting. Their special events catering menus that have been adjusted to include offerings with more fruit and vegetable serving, low-fat snacks, and fewer sugary beverages. All of these changes were made without any noticeable difference to customer satisfaction. The Noridian cafeterias, which serve nearly 1,000 employees, have moved the tiered fruit baskets next to cash registers are now selling out quickly and require daily restocking. Cafeteria managers ensure the first featured dish on menu boards, along with the day's special, are a healthier option. In beverage refrigerators, the location of sugar-sweetened drinks have been moved to lower levels while bottles of water and healthier beverages are at eye level.

Get Involved
Learn about the steps you can take to create a culture of health at your worksite. Encourage your management to adopt such an environment. Tips and details about workplace wellness can be found at heart.org/foodwhereur, while specific information about incorporating smarter dietary choices can be found within AHA's Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit.