



MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

TRAINING APPROACHES

TO STRENGTHEN NUTRITION AND ALLERGY EXPERTISE AMONG STAFF

BY CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD

AS A FOODSERVICE MANAGER, you'll likely need to plan group trainings on topics like allergy awareness and nutrition guidelines. These workshops enhance knowledge and skills of employees (Grappasonni et al., 2018), positively impacting habits. Several studies have linked higher knowledge levels in nutrition, allergies, and food safety to better practices in the kitchen (Bean et al., 2019, Jianu & Goleţ, 2019, Young & Thaivalappil, 2018).

Similarly, research in the Army identified nutrition knowledge deficits and inadequate culinary skills as barriers to implementing nutrition interventions in food service, both of which can be addressed through training (Armstrong et al., 2020). And proper training also aligns with the 2022 Food Code's updated allergen awareness protocols, emphasizing that both the person in charge and employees must be able to describe food allergens and allergic reaction symptoms (Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, 2022).

By ensuring your team is well-versed in these concepts, you'll improve the safety and quality of the meals served and help your department meet industry standards.

HOW SHOULD YOU STRUCTURE YOUR TRAININGS?

While understanding the rationale behind training is essential, it's even more important to implement strategies to enhance the effectiveness of the sessions. Research in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public*

Health examined training preferences of school foodservice managers and employees (Flure et al., 2020). Although specific to school food service, similar preferences may extend to other non-commercial settings, like long-term care.

When it came to logistics, participants expressed a slightly stronger preference for face-to-face learning activities, with 86 percent rating those as "like somewhat" or "like a great deal." In contrast, 74 percent chose those ratings for online learning activities (Flure et al., 2020). It's plausible there may be generational differences among those who prefer online training, though this was not examined.

Similarly, participants preferred training with others compared to training alone. Only 62 percent rated "training by myself" as "like somewhat" or "like a great deal," compared to 68 percent for training with a group, and 71 percent for training with a partner (Flure et al., 2020).

When you're planning your in-services or workshops, consider that folks preferred sessions take place on Tuesdays or Thursdays for a duration of 1 to 2 hours (a duration of 4+ hours was least preferred) (Flure et al., 2020). The least favored training month was December, presumably since people are preoccupied with the holidays (Flure et al., 2020).



SHOULD YOU FOCUS ON THE LEARNING STYLES OF YOUR STAFF?

Within the training itself, popular culture often divides learners into three different styles—visual (learn by seeing), auditory (learn by hearing), and kinesthetic (or tactile; learn by doing) (Furey, 2020). When structuring training, leaders are often encouraged to focus on a particular learner’s style to achieve the best results.

But no scientific evidence supports this theory. In fact, research has not found a connection between catering to a learning style and educational outcomes (Childs-Kean et al., 2020, Kirschner, 2017, Pashler et al., 2008).

However, there is a benefit to presenting information in a variety of ways. Different areas of the brain are stimulated with different types of input, such as words, pictures, touch, etc. (National Academies of Sciences,



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Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Lessons that focus on multimodal learning—incorporating a variety of activities—are helpful in this regard. You don’t need to worry about categorizing your staff into learning styles, though.

WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES SHOULD YOU USE IN TRAINING?

The aforementioned study on school foodservice staff also examined the preferred makeup of an educational session. The five highest-rated options are as follows, with a few ideas for how you might implement these in a nutrition or allergen training (Flure et al., 2020):

1. Hearing from an expert

- Collaborate with your registered dietitian to present on a particular nutrition topic.

- Arrange for a chef specializing in allergy-friendly cuisine to do an interactive food preparation activity.
- Have a friend with a food allergy? Maybe they'd be interested in providing firsthand accounts of their experiences, which can drive home the importance of allergen awareness.
- Invite a speaker from another niche—like a leadership expert—that can discuss mastering nutrition and allergen expertise in the broader context of professional growth. You might have this at the beginning of a training session, priming participants so they're excited about learning, then segue into the actual nutrition or allergen information.

Note: This may be surprising as the top option, but people value information from those who they perceive as experts



TRAINING TYPES AND PREFERENCE RATINGS BY SCHOOL FOODSERVICE STAFF

(Data summarized from Flure et al., 2020)

Training Type	Preference Rating*
Hear from an expert	92%
Interactive activity	85%
Multiple activities during one training	77%
Peer-to-peer sharing	76%
Problem solving or brainstorming	71%
Learn by physical movement	69%
Watching videos	68%
Learn by teaching others the material	60%
Worksheets	57%
Quizzes/knowledge check	55%
Text with many pictures	53%
Role playing	47%

* Percent of Foodservice Staff Rating Activity as "Like Somewhat" or "Like a Great Deal"

or those who they admire. In fact, another study found similar results, linking the expert status of the facilitators with improving foodservice practices among training participants in aged care facilities (Matwiejczyk et al., 2018).

2. Interactive activities

- Conduct a tasting session where staff can sample foods that fit a particular dietary pattern – for example, a pureed lasagna or a vegan meatball.
- Develop interactive games on nutrition and allergy topics, encouraging engagement and knowledge retention.
- Create an allergen "scavenger hunt" by putting out different food packages, nutrition labels, and/or menu descriptions. Ask employees to identify which options contain allergens.
- Break staff into partners or teams, and task them with modifying a recipe to fit a certain dietary or allergy need. You could even have them cook their modified recipes and perform a taste test on the finished results, awarding the top team a small prize.

3. Multiple activities during one training session

- Combine activities like group discussions, expert presentations, case studies, cooking or food preparation, demonstrations, games, videos, recipe modification, and/or stories into one training session. You don't need to use every format in one session, but breaking up a workshop with at least two different modalities can help keep your staff's attention and enhance learning.

4. Peer-to-peer sharing

- Create pairs when doing problem-solving activities so your staff can collaborate on answers.
- Consider partnering seasoned employees with newer staff during training activities, allowing the more experienced staff members to mentor and support the newer ones.
- Ask staff members to swap success stories related to the topic during the training and see if some pairs are willing to share.
- Organize a panel discussion during a training session where you allow more experienced staff members to act as the experts, sharing their tips for handling dietary restrictions and allergy-related situations.
- Create case studies that partners work together to complete, then present their thoughts to the group.



REFERENCES

Scan QR code to view the list of resources for this article.

5. Problem solving or brainstorming

- Present sample scenarios involving a resident with a particular medical condition and dietary order, then facilitate small group discussions on why the diet is necessary and how to accommodate the resident.
- Provide a copy of an article with a real-life scenario of an allergic reaction at a foodservice establishment. Discuss amongst the group: What were the symptoms? Did the staff handle it properly? Could changes have been made to prevent the situation?
- Conduct brainstorming sessions where staff collaboratively generate problem-solving approaches for nutrition or allergen challenges specific to your organization.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When planning these sessions, also consider these factors that can impact their effectiveness:

Accessibility: Trainings offered onsite are likely to garner more attendance than those offered offsite, particularly if the latter requires extensive travel (Flure et al., 2020). Similarly, consider the accessibility of online training, which can be challenging if your locale or your staff do not have reliable Internet access (Flure et al., 2020).

Level of difficulty: You will likely have some staff with adequate experience, and others who are new to your department. Be sure that group trainings review the foundations and

do a 45-minute training that also incorporates games and peer learning? Provide a podcast-based training opportunity? Create interactive culinary experiences? Think creatively!

Good workplace culture:

Researchers interviewed long-term care foodservice staff in a study in *Nutrients*, and found that three themes emerged when it came to improving nutrition practices: the role of food service as being more than just serving food, teamwork among staff, and corporate culture that values continuous improvement (Cave et al., 2021). While enhancing knowledge is important, those new skills may not be put into place unless these other three themes are present too.

BREAKING UP A WORKSHOP WITH AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT MODALITIES

can help keep your staff's attention and enhance learning.

build on them with more advanced topics to accommodate all employees.

Frequency: As mentioned, research has found connections between knowledge and practical application. But some studies found that changes may wane over time without continued education and reinforcement (Patel et al., 2023). More frequent trainings are helpful in this regard.

Innovation: If your department has always structured training as 30-minute lecture-based in-services, shake things up! Could you

MOVING FORWARD

A quick way to remember all the key aspects of successful training approaches is to think of “3 E’s”—*encourage* (reinforce the value of your staff and the value of ongoing development), *educate* (teach the why and how of new concepts and skills), and *engage* (involve them in activities, discussions, and problem-solving). By adopting this multifaceted approach, you can ensure employees are well-prepared to address nutrition and allergy concerns. **E**



CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD | ✉ chrissy@snackinginsneakers.com

Chrissy Carroll is a registered dietitian, freelance writer, and brand consultant based in central Massachusetts.

CE QUESTIONS | MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



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This **Level III PERSONNEL AND COMMUNICATIONS** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic and ability to apply the concepts. The desired outcome is to evaluate application and create continuous quality improvement into best practice.

Reading *Training Approaches to Strengthen Nutrition and Allergy Expertise Among Staff* and successfully completing these questions online in the ANFP Marketplace has been approved for 1 hour of continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. To earn 1 CE hour, visit www.ANFPonline.org/market and select **Edge CE Articles** within the Publications section. Purchase the article and complete the quiz.

1. Research in the Army has noted that which of the following is a barrier to nutrition interventions in food service?
 - A. Nutrition knowledge gaps
 - B. Inadequate culinary skills
 - C. Both of the above
2. In a study in the *International journal of environmental research and public health* on school foodservice staff, which was the highest rated training preference among these three options?
 - A. Training by myself
 - B. Training with a partner
 - C. Training with a group
3. In the same study, what was the preferred duration for workshops and in-services?
 - A. 1-2 hours
 - B. 2-3 hours
 - C. 4+ hours
4. In the same study, which activity was *not* in the top five highest rated training activities?
 - A. Hearing from an expert
 - B. Peer-to-peer sharing
 - C. Worksheets
5. Which of the following is *true* regarding catering training towards an auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learning style?
 - A. It has not been proven to be effective
 - B. It should be done at every training
 - C. It improves educational outcomes
6. You are planning out a training schedule for the year. Which of the following is likely to be *most effective* for enhancing practical application throughout the year?
 - A. One full day training provided in July each year
 - B. 4-week series of trainings provided in December
 - C. Monthly trainings throughout the year of 1 hour each
7. You're planning training around allergy awareness. Which of the following training structures is likely to be *most effective* for enhancing knowledge and practical application?
 - A. Hosting an in-service with a guest speaker, allergy-friendly dessert tasting, and a case study discussion
 - B. An in-service where you play a 60-minute training video
 - C. Providing a handout about top allergens and asking employees to read it
8. What are the "3 E's" to remember when structuring a training?
 - A. Energize, edit, earn
 - B. Encourage, educate, engage
 - C. Elongate, embellish, employ

