

Staying Healthy for the Long Haul

How truckstops and travel plazas can better serve customers with diabetes

A year and a half ago, Bill Decker's life changed when he was diagnosed with diabetes. Soon, the convenience store at the Davis Travel Center in Stony Creek, Va., where Decker is general manager, changed, too. Davis added a four-foot sugar-free snack section that included sugar-free cookies, candy and fresh fruit.

Decker's diabetes diagnosis allowed him to "enter a field that no one had touched" and one the management at Davis embraced. But he thinks other truckstop operators will find similar success by becoming more focused on serving people with diabetes.

Customers took notice. "We've received many compliments," Decker said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 24 million Americans have diabetes. More than 1.6 million new cases are diagnosed each year, making diabetes the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States.

The most common form of diabetes can be prevented or delayed by embracing a healthy diet and physical activity. These same measures are vital in treating the disease. Since truck drivers are often sedentary and have limited food options, they run a higher risk of developing diabetes. By implementing simple changes, travel centers can help all their customers stay healthy on the road.

But it's not just drivers with diabetes who want healthy treats. As the American public continues to become more health conscious, travel centers are offering healthy options to better serve all travelers.

Quick tips to make your facility more diabetic-friendly

In the restaurant

Offer healthy entrees or devote a portion of the menu to healthier choices and clearly label it. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) suggests the following ideas for making restaurant entrees healthier: Offer grilled or broiled meats, provide whole-grain buns and bread, and choose liquid oils for cooking instead of solid fats.

Food labeling is vital for customers on a healthy diet. The recently passed healthcare legislation requires restaurants with 20 or more locations to meet a national standard for nutritional labeling. In the coming months, federal officials will develop guidelines to accompany this new law.

Allowing customers to substitute more items on the menu can encourage healthy choices. One simple idea is to offer a choice of fries or a side salad with sandwiches. Making entrees to order similarly allows



health conscious eaters to ask that high calorie items be omitted from their meals.

In the convenience store

Fresh fruit and vegetables can be hard to come by on the road, but according to the ADA they are one of the best food choices for people with diabetes. Offer fruit that can be easily grabbed and eaten on the go like apples and bananas.

Provide clearly marked sugar-free and low-carbohydrate products that drivers can keep in their vehicles for when hunger strikes on the road.

To encourage physical activity

Information on easy exercises that don't require a gym is available online and through health organizations. Consider offering printouts for drivers to keep in their cabs or including posters throughout your facility.

Think about creating a walking loop around your facility for customers looking for quick and easy physical activity. Let customers know the route and the mileage.

An onsite health clinic can also be a valuable resource for drivers whose hectic schedules may not allow for regular doctor visits. ●

Online resources

American Diabetes Association (ADA)
www.diabetes.org

ADA's My Food Advisor
tracker.diabetes.org/myfoodadvisor.html

CDC Diabetes Information
www.cdc.gov/diabetes

National Diabetes Education Program
www.ndep.nih.gov and www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndep/index.htm

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse
diabetes.niddk.nih.gov

