

School Meals Proven the Healthy Choice

Are school meals healthy? Myths and stereotypes abound, but the facts are clear when it comes to meals served through the National School Lunch Program: school meals are nutritious and an important part of addressing the childhood obesity epidemic.

What do "school meals" consist of? Know the facts!

Oftentimes, people do not know the most primary fact about foods offered at school during the day. There are essentially two types of foods offered in school cafeterias during the school day. Meals served through the federally funded USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), and basically all other foods that are not.

Meals served through NSLP and SBP are required to meet national nutrition standards by federal law. In return, schools receive reimbursement for each meal served. All other foods are typically served through vending machines, a la carte foods, fundraisers, class parties, etc. These foods, often known as "competitive foods" because they compete with NSLP and NSBP, are not required to meet federal law. However, they are also increasingly being subject to local, county and state laws that require nutrition standards.

Below are several popular misconceptions about school meals and the truth behind the myths.

Myth #1: School meals make children obese.

Fact: Students that eat meals served through the National School Lunch Program are more likely to be at a healthy weight. Research published in the August 2003 issue of *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* concluded that "girls in food insecure households had significantly reduced odds of being at risk of overweight if they participated in the [National School Lunch, School Breakfast and Food Stamp Programs." The research highlights the importance of food assistance programs to low-income children not only in addressing hunger "but also in potentially protecting them from excess weight gain."^[1] Additionally research from 2007 found that students gain weight during the summer months when they are at home and lose weight during the school year when they are able to eat school meals. Increasing the availability of whole grain products was the most popular response for the second straight year in the 2008 SNA Back to School Trends Report, cited by 85.2% of school nutrition directors describing food and nutrition efforts in place in their school districts. Reducing or limiting trans fats showed a sizeable increase in popularity since 2007, up to 81.8% from 73.6%. Other policies in place among a significant number of districts include:

- Increasing the availability of healthier beverages in vending machines (74.6%)
- Limiting fat content of a la carte/vending items (71.8%)
- Reducing or limiting the amount of added sugar in foods (70.1%)
- Reducing or limiting the sodium content in foods (57%), which was asked for the first time this year

Myth #2: Schools serve junk food for school lunch.

Fact: Meals served under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must, by federal law, meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. No more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat. School lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, calcium and calories. These guidelines apply over the course of one week of school lunch menus. According to the Schoolplease turn to page 4

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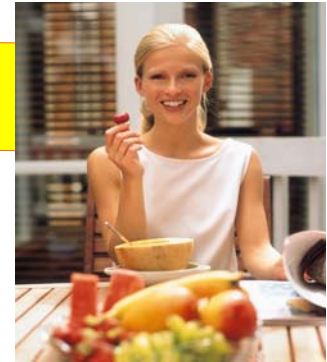
Parents Block: "Get Smart About Salt" Tips for the Low-Salt Diner

- Celebrate salt-free cooking! Use herbs, spices and salt-free seasoning blends to bring out the best in your dish.
- Use salt shakers only for decoration. The American Heart Association estimates that by setting aside the salt shaker, Americans could reduce salt and sodium intake by 30%.
- Indulge in foods naturally low in salt and sodium. Emphasize fruits and vegetables to reduce sodium and gain the many health benefits they offer.
- Keep it fresh! Choose fresh and frozen vegetables (without sauce) more often. Canned vegetables are typically higher in salt and sodium. Look for canned foods with no salt added. Drain and rinse canned foods. Reduce the salt content by draining and rinsing canned food items.
- Read food labels. Find Sodium-Free, Very Low Sodium or Low Sodium options. Check the Nutrition Facts panel for sodium content per serving.
- Watch for hidden salt and sodium. Bouillon cubes, meat tenderizers, marinades, soy sauce and steak sauce can be loaded with salt and sodium.
- Enjoy unsalted options such as unsalted nuts and seeds.

Compliments of the American Dietetic Association

WWW.EATRIGHT.ORG accessed March 31, 2009.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



“What’s a normal diet supposed to look like, anyway?”

By Dana Scafidi

Student at Marple Newtown Senior High School

What is YOUR recommended daily allowance of fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, milk, oils, and “Discretionary servings?” How many calories should you consume for your age, gender, and activity level?

The new food guide pyramid can answer all those questions and more. In Mrs. Kelly’s Foods and Nutrition 1 class, we learned about our daily allowances and serving sizes. Did you know that a deck of cards is a serving size for meat? A serving of fruit is the size of a tennis ball, or that your daily vegetable intake should be about the size of a light bulb?

We recently finished a project on our personalized pyramids and assessments of our diets. For our project we had to journal the food we ate for 3 days. The goal was to find out what foods we were high and low in individually. It is very important to eat a balanced diet throughout our lifespan, since it influences our feeling healthy and happy. To change your diet is life altering, but it is a commitment to a better, healthier life.

As a class we found out that most of the guys were high in protein since they ate more meat.

Generally speaking, most girls do not get the amount of calcium that we should, and it was eye opening to actually see it instead of just hearing about it. It is very important for women to bank as much calcium as possible so we can prevent osteoporosis. It was beneficial for us to notice how low it was so that we can incorporate more calcium in our diets.

As a class we noticed that the kids who ate more junk food consumed almost no fruit, which is because they craved sweetness that fruit can deliver.

After all of our findings, we were required to create an action plan on how we can add more of the nutrients we need daily into our diets. For example, those who were low in fruit could substitute a plain piece of fruit for fruit juices, smoothies, or a yogurt that has fresh fruit, which our school now offers!

For the people who were low in calcium, we could trade that glass of milk for a latte, frozen yogurt, creamy soups, milkshakes, chocolate milk or that relaxing familiar mug of hot chocolate.

“Keep half of your grains whole” is a rule of thumb with our grains. To add more grains in your diet instead of eating a piece of bread you could try crackers like Triscuits, a classic peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole wheat bread, pasta, or try some whole grain cereals like Frosted Mini Wheats or Cheerios. Here’s a tip; when looking for whole grains, look for the word “whole” on the box.

To increase the meat in your diet, you could try eating peanut butter and other nuts. Beans are considered meat, and why not try the newly popular hummus dip to compliment those whole grain crackers.

Getting enough vegetables is an issue with the way people live their lives today. We are very rushed and it often leads to our skipping the vital nutrients in meals. So to get those veggies, instead of those boring raw vegetables, you could jazz it up with some ranch or yogurt dip. Not only does it taste great, but children love it too. There is a juice called V-8 which has 8 vegetables in it, Soups are good, here’s an easy one: try ordering a pizza with a topping of vegetables, and shish-K-bobs are a delicious way to achieve our vegetables.

The new pyramid has room for oils; there are good and bad oils. The bad ones are “hydrogenated oils” and “saturated fats”, which block arteries and cause cholesterol, so we should avoid these oils. To counter that there are unsaturated fats, which are the “good fats”. The mono-unsaturated fats found in olive and peanut oils create the opposite effect saturated fats do; they unclog blood vessels that are blocked by cholesterol. Use unsaturated fats in cooking that are found in various vegetable oils. Try to eat foods rich in oils such as olives, some fish, nuts, and avocados.

Eating healthy does not have to be expensive, tedious, dull or unappetizing. Making healthier choices is a matter of taking small steps and finding the nutrients you need in a form that you take pleasure in.

Healthy Happenings at Marple Newtown Food Services

by Eileen M. Bellew, MA., RD., LDN



With the implementation of our Wellness Policy two years ago, many changes have taken place within our schools. Below are some of the highlights within food services recently discussed at our District Wellness Committee Meeting.

At the elementary school level, we have introduced healthier snacks to our population. Some of our tasty delights include fresh veggies and dip, fresh fruits, such as sliced apples, low fat cheese sticks, reduced fat ice cream, chips and salsa, fruit juices and water. Snacks are reasonably priced at .50 cents and we limit your child to 2 snacks per day. Also, please remember, our "Celebrations" party packages as a great way to provide healthy party foods for your child's classroom party. Feel free to access the form on our website or contact your School Food Service Manager.

Snacks are healthier and meals participation have increased at Paxon Hollow Middle School. Last year was our challenge year! As I would monitor the lunch lines, all I would see on the platters were French fries and soft pretzels. My thought was how do our students get through the day eating an unbalanced meal? We needed to make positive changes. Our goal for this year was to offer healthier meal choices, which would reduce the need to purchase "other" foods, such as French fries and pretzels. New healthier snack choices were also introduced and fried foods were removed from the menu. As a result, I now see students eating "complete" meals, which include an entrée, veggie and fruit, and milk. Meal counts have more than doubled, we no longer fry foods and offer healthier food choices!

Moving onto high school, it's now time to make healthy choices because you want to. For our mature customers, healthier snack choices are available and we fry potatoes items only 3 times per week. At the high school level, we offer an array of food choices from made to order sandwiches, hot platters, salad bar, or oven baked pizza. Our newest healthy snack is our fruit parfaits made with low fat yogurt and fresh fruits. Complete meals are, again, encouraged and are certainly the best value for your money. We also offer healthy food choices in our vending machine for after school activities.

Our goal was to begin at the elementary level with good nutrition, carry over into our middle school, and finally, to our high school. Presently, we are making positive progress when measured against the Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, the PA Nutrition Standards for Healthy Foods. Food Services will continue to encourage proper nutrition, offer choices to students and staff, and look for new products.

Looking to next year, we have several of our committee members retiring. Therefore, we are in need of new committee members. If you are interested or have ideas on healthy offerings, please email me at ebellew@mnsd.org.

As always, thank you for supporting school meals!



Serving our students and making a difference by Eileen M. Bellew, MA., RD., LDN

Paxon Hollow Middle School encourages "Positive On People" for staff and faculty. It was brought to my attention that a member of our food service staff was recognized on the P.O.P.S. The following was written by a middle school student and we thank him/her for recognizing one of us.

Rose Orfanelli— Rose has changed my Paxon experience for the better. Everyday at lunch she is always one of the nicest, saying hello, along with other greetings. She even remembers me outside of school. When she rings me up for lunch, we always have a nice conversation about anything. She makes waiting in line for lunch fun and I always get in her line.

I want to thank the student who wrote the statement explaining the positive influence Mrs. Orfanelli has made in their school. We are lucky to have Rose, as well as many other dedicated people, working within Food Service.

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Dietary Assessment III (2004-2005 school year.), in about 90 percent of all schools nationwide, students had opportunities to select low-fat lunch options. SNDA III also found that school meals continue to meet or exceed virtually all of the recommended daily allowances (RDA) for key nutrients analyzed for school breakfasts and lunches [2]. No super-sizing here. The meals served as part of the NSLP are provided in age-appropriate serving sizes - making schools one of the last places in the U.S. where you can purchase a meal with the recommended serving sizes.

Myth #3: Schools don't serve enough fruits or vegetables for lunch.

Fact: According to the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment III, roughly two-thirds of all school lunch menus offer more than the required two fruit and vegetable choices set by United States Department of Agriculture regulations [3]. The *2007 School Nutrition Operations Report* conducted by SNA found that fresh fruits and vegetables are offered in 95.7% of schools [4]. Furthermore, salad bars are offered on a daily basis in over half of the districts (at least one school per district) in the country [1]. Vegetarian options are served in over 51.5% of middle schools and high schools around the country, according to the *2007 SNA Operations Survey Report*.

Myth #4: Schools serve fried, greasy foods.

Fact: Schools may serve French fries, chicken nuggets or pizza at times. However, because the meals are always required to meet the Recommended Dietary Allowances, the foods still meet required nutrition standards, including fat and saturated fat. This is because they are often baked, not fried, made with low-fat or lean ingredients, and served with vegetables, fruit and other options that make each meal balanced and nutritious. Several innovative examples of what schools offer for lunch include 'farmers' market' salad bars that feature locally grown produce, pizza with no-fat cheese or a beef patty made partially with vegetable protein. Many food favorites like pizza and French fries are made to specifications unique to school food service: crusts may use whole wheat flour or be enriched with soy protein, low-fat or non-fat cheeses are used a great deal, and healthy cooking techniques like baking instead of frying are often used.

Myth #5: Sack lunches from home are better than school meals.

Fact: Through the National School Lunch Program, according to 2001 research by Dr. Alice Jo Rainville, Eastern Michigan University, "reimbursable school lunches provided three times as many dairy products, twice as much fruit, and seven times the vegetables amounts as lunches brought from home, which provided three times as many snack items." The research also concluded that "reimbursable school lunches were lower in fat, provided more nutrients, and overall provided more variety than lunches brought from home" [5].

Myth #6: Soda is served with school lunch.

Fact: Federal law prohibits the sale of soda as a Food of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) in the cafeteria during the school lunch period. State and local regulations may further prohibit the sale of soda before or after the lunch period or in other locations on the school campus.

Myth #7: Only junk food is available through a la carte lines and vending machines.

Fact: While few federal nutrition standards exist for a la Carte and vended foods and beverages, school nutrition professionals are an active part of the national trend at the state and local levels to implement nutrition standards for these items. School nutrition professionals help set nutrition policies at the local level through their state, county and local governments. Through federally mandated Local School Wellness Policies, school nutrition professionals are joining with parents, students and other school stakeholders to set nutrition guidelines for all foods and beverages sold on school campuses. School Nutrition Association (SNA) aggressively supports consistent, national nutrition standards for all foods and beverages available in the school environment.

Myth #8: What is served at schools is out of my control.

Fact: You can become active in setting policies at the local level! Join your local School Board, write a letter and voice what you think schools should offer students. Wellness is a community effort and needs the support of the entire community.

School nutrition professionals are committed to providing safe and nutritious meals to all children. Parents are encouraged to visit their student's cafeteria, try a lunch and talk to their school foodservice director about the nutritional profile of foods served.

Accessed April 14, 2009 at School Nutrition Association at www.sna.org

[1] Jones et al. *Lower Risk of Overweight in School-aged Food Insecure Girls Who Participate in Food Assistance*, *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, August 2003.

[2] US Department of Agriculture. *School Nutrition and Dietary Assessment III*, November 2007.

[3] US Department of Agriculture. *School Nutrition and Dietary Assessment III*, November 2007.

[4] 2004 SNA School Fruit and Vegetable Procurement Report

[5] School Nutrition Association, *2007 School Nutrition Operations Survey*, August 2007.

Visit our webpage at www.mnsd.org
and look for our information under Food Service