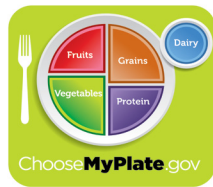
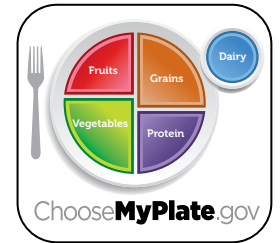


10 tips

Nutrition Education Series



the **School Day**
just got
Healthier
United States Department of Agriculture



Nearly 32 million children receive meals throughout the school day. These meals are based on nutrition standards from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. New nutrition standards for schools increase access to healthy food and encourage kids to make smart choices. Schools are working to make meals more nutritious, keep all students hunger-free, and help children maintain or reach a healthy weight.

1 healthier school meals for your children

Your children benefit from healthier meals that include more whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, lower sodium foods, and less saturated fat. Talk to your child about the changes in the meals served at school.

2 more fruits and vegetables every day

Kids have fruits and vegetables at school every day. A variety of vegetables are served throughout the week including red, orange, and dark-green vegetables.



3 more whole-grain foods

Half of all grains offered are whole-grain-rich foods such as whole-grain pasta, brown rice, and oatmeal. Some foods are made by replacing half the refined-grain (white) flour with whole-grain flour.



4 both low-fat milk (1%) and fat-free milk varieties are offered

Children get the same calcium and other nutrients, but with fewer calories and less saturated fat by drinking low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk. For children who can't drink milk due to allergies or lactose intolerance, schools can offer milk substitutes, such as calcium-fortified soy beverages.



5 less saturated fat and salt

A variety of foods are offered to reduce the salt and saturated fat in school meals. Main dishes may include beans, peas, nuts, tofu, or seafood as well as lean meats or poultry. Ingredients and foods contain less salt (sodium).



6 more water

Schools can provide water pitchers and cups on lunch tables, a water fountain, or a faucet that allows students to fill their own bottles or cups with drinking water. Water is available where meals are served.

7 new portion sizes

School meals meet children's calorie needs, based on their age. While some portions may be smaller, kids still get the nutrition they need to keep them growing and active.

8 stronger local wellness programs

New policies offer opportunities for parents and communities to create wellness programs that address local needs. Talk with your principal, teachers, school board, parent-teacher association, and others to create a strong wellness program in your community.

9 MyPlate can help kids make better food choices

Show children how to make healthy food choices at school by using MyPlate. Visit ChooseMyPlate.gov for tips and resources.



10 resources for parents

School meal programs can provide much of what children need for health and growth. But for many parents, buying healthy foods at home is a challenge. Learn more about healthy school meals and other nutrition assistance programs at www.fns.usda.gov.



Tips for Eating Healthy When Eating out

- As a beverage choice, ask for water or order fat-free or low-fat milk, unsweetened tea, or other drinks without added sugars.
- Ask for whole-wheat bread for sandwiches.
- In a restaurant, start your meal with a salad packed with veggies, to help control hunger and feel satisfied sooner.
- Ask for salad dressing to be served on the side. Then use only as much as you want.
- Choose main dishes that include vegetables, such as stir fries, kebobs, or pasta with a tomato sauce.
- Order steamed, grilled, or broiled dishes instead of those that are fried or sautéed.
- Choose a small" or "medium" portion. This includes main dishes, side dishes, and beverages.
- Order an item from the menu instead heading for the "all-you-can-eat" buffet.
- If main portions at a restaurant are larger than you want, try one of these strategies to keep from overeating:
 - Order an appetizer-sized portion or a side dish instead of an entrée.
 - Share a main dish with a friend.
 - If you can chill the extra food right away, take leftovers home in a "doggy bag."
 - When your food is delivered, set aside or pack half of it to go immediately.
 - Resign from the "clean your plate club" - when you've eaten enough, leave the rest.
- To keep your meal moderate in calories, fat, and sugars:
 - Ask for salad dressing to be served "on the side" so you can add only as much as you want.
 - Order foods that do not have creamy sauces or gravies
 - Add little or no butter to your food.
 - Choose fruits for dessert most often.
- On long commutes or shopping trips, pack some fresh fruit, cut-up vegetables, low-fat string cheese sticks, or a handful of unsalted nuts to help you avoid stopping for sweet or fatty snacks.



Back-to-School Nutrition Tips

As the summer starts winding down and Labor Day approaches, millions of children and teens get ready to go back to school. While most of us plan ahead for clothes, school supplies, and books, how many parents plan ahead for an important decision that children must make every day at school: What do I eat for lunch? The alarming increase of childhood obesity during the past few decades indicates that the choices made were perhaps not always the best ones.

While it is easy for us to regulate what our children eat when they are young, we cannot always control the in-class birthday parties, candy-based fund-raisers, and midday snacks. Furthermore, it becomes equally vital that we stay involved in the nutrition decision-making process as our children reach middle school and high school. Studies have shown that the habits we start during childhood and adolescence often carry on into adulthood. So, while we prepare our children to succeed in the classroom, we also need to start preparing them to succeed in the lunchroom. These tips may help.

Review weekly lunch menus

The National School Lunch Program requires that the meals offered in most schools must have a certain amount of calories, fat, saturated fat, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron. It may surprise you to learn that many foods fit into these guidelines, including chicken nuggets and tater tots.

Sit down and review the weekly or monthly lunch menu with your child. Discuss which foods are liked and why certain foods are perhaps healthier choices than others. After talking about it, come to an agreement for each meal and have your child circle the selection. Even small decisions can make a huge impact, such as choosing regular milk instead of flavored milk, which has added sugar.

Studies have shown that when you involve children in the decision-making process, they are much more likely to actually perform the desired activity. In this case, that means selecting a healthier lunch!

Know the school's policy on snacks

If your child is just starting at a new school or if major changes have happened from year to year, visit the school and ask about how snacks are handled.

Ask these questions:

- Are milk breaks provided in the morning where children can bring in snacks?
- Are children allowed to snack in class?
- Are vending machines accessible to children between classes?
- Does the school have numerous fund-raisers that focus on selling candy or chocolate to students?
- Are specialty snack bars available in the lunchroom, which may tempt children to avoid the regular lunch line in favor of less healthy alternatives?

Knowing the policies can help you plan for and deal with them. For example, you could provide your child with a healthy snack for breaks or discuss with your child which snacks are healthier at the vending machines and snack bars. If you are really unhappy with your school's current

food and snack policies, get involved in the Parent-Teacher Association to promote nutrition awareness through policy changes and/or education of teachers, staff, and administrators. No one knows a problem exists unless you tell someone.

Pack your own healthy lunch or snacks

The best way to positively impact food decisions is to make sure that you provide a nutritious lunch and snacks each day, foods that you know your child will want to eat. Lunch often is packed without the child's input. You pack a healthful lunch, thinking that your child will eat well while at school. Instead, your child gets to school, trades your banana for a mini candy bar, eats some of a friend's chips, buys a soda, and then throws the rest of your lunch away.

Before packing anything, ask your child what to include. The child may answer "chicken nuggets." Explain why chicken nuggets are not the best option and maybe some small pieces of grilled chicken cut up into "nuggets" with a side of barbecue sauce would provide a healthier choice. Have your child help you make the "nuggets" with some small cookie cutters. If you want to help assure that your child will eat what is packed, involve your child in making the lunch.

Ask your child what types of fruits and vegetables to pack. Cut those fruits and vegetables up into easy-to-eat pieces, such as apple slices with a little lemon to retain the color, grapes, pineapple chunks, baby carrots, string beans, etc. Put the snacks in a plastic bag, so they are easy to access and eat during the day. Sometimes the difference between a child eating an apple and not eating it is simply slicing it up.

Finally, give your child something sweet. We are all born liking sweet-tasting foods, so offer your child something that will satisfy this craving, so it is not necessary to go looking for it elsewhere. A few Hershey's® Kisses, a couple of mini-sized pieces of chocolate, a box of raisins, or even some dates/figs are great options.

If you are not able to pack your child an entire lunch, try to provide a few healthy snacks for classroom snack times. Often children go 5 hours between meals in the morning (7 AM to noon) and about the same amount of time after lunch (noon to 5 PM). Children are growing and need fuel for both their body and mind. A peanut butter and banana sandwich, cut-up fruits and vegetables, trail mix, and even whole-food-based granola bars are great options if no refrigeration is available. Make sure to follow the snack guidelines set by your child's school.

Set an example at home and at school

While it is great that we try to have our children eat healthy during the day, if they come home to fast food and pizza most evenings, we are sending them mixed signals. We must set an example of healthy eating at home before we can expect our children to make healthy choices when we are not with them.

Most children and even most teens, even if they will not admit it, tend to follow the habits of their parents. So, how good are your nutrition habits? Taking the time to plan and prepare healthier meals at home will not only impact you, but will benefit your child and the entire household. You also can get your child in the habit of trying new foods by cooking, which is important for good health. Most children establish their eating habits by around 6 years of age, so if they are used to trying new foods, they probably are more receptive to trying healthier alternatives during school lunches. On the other hand, if they have grown up eating chicken

nuggets, hot dogs, and tater tots, the green beans sitting on their lunch tray probably do not look appetizing.

Teach moderation at home, so children can practice at school as well. If they learn that a treat or snack involves only a couple cookies or a small handful of chips, rather than the whole bag, those habits will carry over when they are given treats in school for birthdays, fund-raisers, and rewards for doing well in class, such as pizza parties.

Finally, try to educate your children about health. You can practice this way:

- **Math:** If there are 4 grams (g) of sugar in a packet and 32 g of sugar in this bottle of soda, how many sugar packets are you drinking?
- **Science:** Do you know that clogged arteries can impact your heart and blood flow? Demonstrate this by using plastic tubing, lard, and some red-dyed water.
- **History:** Which foods that we eat today are native to North America?

All across the country, nutrition educators and researchers are developing fantastic curricula, such as CookShop and Choice, Control & Change, to help promote healthier foods in schools and healthier students in the classroom by using techniques similar to the ones previously described.

Do not wait until back-to-school time to start considering what to give your child for lunch—start now! Promoting healthy eating at home will help children eat better when they go back to school and vice versa. It can all start with just one baby carrot or an “ants on a log” (celery with a little bit of peanut butter and a few raisins stuck into it). Just make sure to eat it with them!

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