

FitFuture

strategies for better living.

Series on Fitness & Nutrition for Families

HOW YOUR SCHOOL'S MEAL PROGRAM CAN HELP



National School Lunch Program participants are more likely than non-participants to consume vegetables, dairy products, and protein-rich foods. They also consume less soda and/or fruit drinks.¹



Research shows that school lunches contain three times as many dairy products, twice as much fruit and seven times the amount of vegetables as lunches brought from home.²

New Foods, New Year: Parenting Strategies for Good Nutrition in 2008

By Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD

Research shows that when compared to picky eaters, children who enjoy a greater variety of foods have more nutritious diets. As the variety of food increases, so does the variety of nutrients needed for growth, development and general health. However, encouraging children to try new foods can be a challenge.

When parents present healthy meals and snacks in a pleasant and unassuming manner, children will learn to enjoy and appreciate a wide variety of food. This can seem more easily said than done, but here is some help!

Here are some DOs and DON'Ts when it comes to providing new foods to your children:

DO ✓	DON'T ✗
Eat healthfully yourself. Children are influenced by parents, particularly the parent of the same gender.	Coax or beg children to eat.
Introduce new foods along with well-liked familiar foods.	Offer rewards or punishment for eating or not eating.
Allow children to decide how much to eat. Children require several smaller meals/snacks per day.	Rush children to finish a meal and refuse to offer snacks between meals.
Use mealtime to strengthen family connectedness while helping children develop good eating habits.	Let children eat alone. Allow distractions such as television.

Mealtime responsibilities are divided between you and your children. You are in charge of deciding what to eat, when to eat and where to eat. Adults can set the stage for good family nutrition by:

- **Choosing and preparing healthy foods**
- **Providing meals and snacks at routine times**
- **Creating a pleasant family dining atmosphere**
- **Role modeling the mealtime behaviors that children must learn**

A difficult part of a parent's job can be to trust that children CAN decide how much and whether to eat. When allowed to do so, children will:

- **Eat** (we all have an innate desire to avoid starvation!)
- **Eat the amount they need** (they will listen to their internal cues for hunger and satiety)
- **Learn to eat what their parents eat**
- **Learn to behave well at mealtime**

Parents would surely agree that time spent planning meals, modeling good habits and encouraging healthful choices is time well spent!

Brought to you by your
School Food Service Department

¹"Dietary Intake and it's Relationship with School Meal Participation." in Final report submitted to the USDA Children's Diets in the Mid-1990's Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., (2001)

²A. Rainville, "Nutritional Quality of Reimbursable School Lunches Compared to Lunches Brought From Home.", in *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, (Spring 2001)