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Questions & Answers About School Lunchroom Strategies to Promote Health

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Schools are in a unique position to provide healthful foods and promote healthful eating among our youth. Research has shown that certain strategies can be implemented in the cafeteria setting that may help students make more nutritious food choices.

Q: What are the dietary guidelines and how do they apply to the National School Lunch Program?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are based on current nutrition research and provide food and beverage recommendations for those 2 years and older. The guidelines are updated every five years based on recent research. These recommendations are intended to help Americans make healthful food choices and serve as a basis for nutrition policies and programs in the U.S., including the National School Lunch Program.

Q: What nutrition messages do the Dietary Guidelines recommend?

The Dietary Guidelines recommend balancing calories by enjoying food but eating less and avoiding oversized portions. The guidelines also recommend increasing fruits and vegetables to cover at least half of your plate at each meal, making more of your grain choices whole grains. Nutrition experts recommend that children and adults drink water instead of sweetened beverages to quench thirst and choose foods such as soup, bread and frozen meals that have lower sodium content.

Q: How can school food service personnel set up the cafeteria to help students make more healthful choices?

Many strategies have been the subject of research. These strategies show how to make the healthful choice the easier choice:

- Place vegetables, fruits or the most nutrient-dense entrée at the front of the serving line. Students will fill the majority of their plate with the first food item they see.
- Provide sliced or cut-up fruit that is easier and more pleasurable for students to eat.
- Offer two or more different vegetable options to give students more choices.
- Offer a salad bar to increase the amount of vegetables provided.

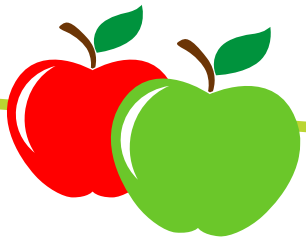
Q: What other strategies can be implemented in the lunchroom?

Naming vegetables and nutrient-dense entrees with fun, attractive, age-appropriate names potentially can increase their consumption. Research has shown that using positive health messages such as “Eat fruit and be slim” (instead of negative messages such as “Don’t eat candy or you’ll get fat”) can encourage healthful eating.



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NDSU Extension Resources for Schools and Parents

Visit NDSU Extension's Food and Nutrition website at **www.ag.ndsu.edu/food** for many resources about nutrition, food safety and health. Type in the titles and publication numbers in the search box. These are some examples of handouts available:

Food Safety

FN572 – "Food Safety Basics: A Reference Guide for Foodservice Operators"

FN582 – "Fight BAC! Fight Foodborne Bacteria"

FN1350 – "It's Clean, but Is It Sanitized?"

FN712 – "Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold: A Foodservice Guide to Thermometers and Safe Temperatures"

FN1444 – "Wash Your Hands!"

Health and Nutrition

FN1643 – "All About Beans"

FN1398 – "Eat Smart: Enjoy Healthier Snacks at Work"

FN600 – "Finding the Truth II: Are Popular Nutrition and Health Information Sources Reliable?"

FN722 – "Focus on Fruits"

FN723 – "Get Your Calcium-rich Foods"

FN724 – "Go Lean With Protein"

FN725 – "Know Your Fats"

FN726 – "Make at Least Half Your Grains Whole Grains"

FN1508 – "Pulses the Perfect Food"

FN1686 – "Q&A about Sodium and Its Impact on Our Health"

FN1688 – "Steps to Reducing Sodium in Recipes"

FN727 – "Vary Your Veggies"

More Beans and Pulses

Nutrition experts have recommended using more dry edible beans, lentils, chickpeas and split peas on school menus. Visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/fieldtofork.

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