

SEPTEMBER 2010

# BACK TO SCHOOL!

## WHAT'S YOUR CHILD EATING FOR LUNCH?

### "JUST SAY NO"

Across the nation, our children are being served cafeteria lunches that are, well, abysmal. A typical school lunch features a crispy meat or cheese filled nugget, syrup-soaked fruit, and vegetables marinated in brine. Hardly appetizing fare, and certainly worthy of an "D" in terms of nutrition. School educators talk about the importance of eating fruits, vegetables and whole grains, yet our children are getting mixed messages when they hit the cafeteria line. To add to this problem is the "ala carte" dining that is offered in middle schools and high schools where kids can ditch their lunches in favor of vending machine junk food.

An unfortunate reality is that many American children would go hungry were it not for the National School Lunch Program, or NSLP. The NSLP provides free or reduced-price lunches to over 31 million children every year; that's half of all American students. President Truman established the NSLP in 1946 to ensure that every child had a nourishing lunch because healthy children contribute to the nation's prosperity.

School districts that participate in the NSLP receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from the USDA and in return, must offer lunches that meet the 1995 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Through *Team Nutrition*, an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, educators can obtain nutrition education programs to help students understand the role of nutrition in health. Additionally, food service personnel can receive assistance in planning healthful meals.

According to the USDA, however, less than a third of schools serve food that is below the 30 percent fat recommendation, and most exceed the 500 milligram sodium limit. To be fair, school districts are asked to do miracles with only \$2.68 per child, which is a challenge. Heavily processed foods are often cheap. Some school districts have been proactive in limiting or evening banning flavored milks that are high in sugar. Small changes like this can have a great impact on the number of calories a child consumes at lunch.

Good news is on the horizon, though. Last July, the House Education and Labor Committee with assistance by the American Dietetic Association, approved legislation to reauthorize child nutrition programs. Several policies were implemented including: recommending that nutrition professionals such as registered dietitians head up district school nutrition programs; increasing meal reimbursement rates for schools that meet specific nutrition standards; and improving nutrition education for child nutrition program providers.



**Click here for some nutritious and kid-approved lunch ideas!**



### TAKE CONTROL BACK

There is a lot you can do as a parent or caretaker to improve your child's midday meal and the following tips can help:

#### Brown Bag It

Make your child a super healthful lunch. Instead of the same boring sandwich, try finger foods such as a hummus with whole grain pita chips, whole strawberries, and a container of low fat yogurt.

#### Get Involved

Start a parent group so you can voice your concerns and offer suggestions to the school's food service provider. Even lobbying for one change such as requesting 100 percent whole grain baked products can make a difference.

#### Plant a Garden

Enlist the help of your child's classroom to plant a small vegetable or herb garden. Children take a great deal of pride in growing food and they are more likely to eat the foods they plant.

### MINDFUL NUTRITION COUNSELING

5061 N. PULASKI RD.  
CHICAGO, IL. 60630  
773.539.9364

<http://www.mindfulnutritionusa.com>

# Kid-Approved Lunches



**All Wrapped Up:** top a whole wheat six inch flour tortilla with a handful of bagged, washed lettuce mix and shredded carrots. Top with store-bought grilled skinless chicken strips (or leftovers from the night before). Sprinkle part-skim mozzarella cheese and a drizzle of low fat vinaigrette over mixture and roll up like a burrito. Serve with apple slices and a container of low fat fruit yogurt.

**Mug 'o Soup and Sammy:** prepare tomato soup with skim milk and heat until hot but not scalding. Pour soup into an insulated thermos. Place two slices of deli roast beef and a slice of cheddar cheese on a slice whole grain bread. Spread a second slice of bread with mild salsa and place on top of sandwich. Throw in a handful of baby carrots to complete this satisfying lunch.

**Grecian Feast:** slice an extra thick pita pocket in half. Spread a ¼ cup of hummus inside each pocket and top with sliced black olives and feta cheese crumbles. Add some cucumber slices and grape tomatoes on the side with low fat ranch dressing.

**Rockin' Ravioli:** prepare frozen spinach and cheese ravioli according to package directions; drain and return to sauce pan. Stir in prepared low sodium marinara sauce and heat until hot. Place into an insulated thermos. Serve with a whole wheat bread stick and orange wedges.

**Barbecue Blast:** shred left over chicken breast, and mix thoroughly with bottled barbecue sauce. Spread chicken mixture on the bottom half of a whole wheat sandwich bun. Sprinkle with packaged cabbage slaw and top with other bun half. Pack banana slices sprinkled with cinnamon, and a container of low fat pudding.

**Yummy Yogurt Parfait:** in a reusable food container, alternately layer low fat vanilla yogurt with blueberries and strawberries, then top with 1/3 of a cup of low fat granola. Serve with whole grain crackers, and some sweet crunchy snow peas.

**Power-packed Pinwheels:** spread low sodium marinara sauce on the top a six inch whole wheat flour tortilla. Follow with a layer of washed, fresh spinach and grated carrots. Sprinkle with part skim mozzarella cheese and roll up like a burrito. Microwave on high heat for 30 seconds and let cool for one minute. Slice into one inch rounds and cover in foil to retain heat. Add a single cup container of no sugar added applesauce and a couple oatmeal raisin cookies.

There are many great resources that offer valuable information on innovative school lunch programs, and child nutrition, in general. Check out the following web sites:

<http://www.TheLunchbox.org>

<http://www.HealthySchoolsCampaign.org>

<http://www.FarmToSchool.org>

<http://www.ilunchbox.com>

<http://www.mindfulnutritionusa.com>