

FALL 2018

ASK THE DIETITIAN

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q. Are school lunches really a healthy option?

A. Yes! All meals from The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must follow strict meal pattern standards. Students must be offered, at a minimum, the following during every lunch (range represents different requirements by grade level):

- 1/2 to 1 cup of fruit
- 3/4 to 1 cup of vegetables (including a mix of colors like dark green, red and orange)
- 1 to 2 servings of whole grains
- 1 to 2 or more ounces of meat or vegetarian protein
- 1 cup of low-fat or fat-free milk

In addition, meals must meet specific nutrient criteria for calories, saturated fat and sodium to promote good health.

Q. But how do they compare to lunches brought from home?

A. Three recent studies examined packed lunches versus lunches bought at school. Among the findings:^{1,2,3}

- Students who purchased school lunch were more likely to consume milk, fruit and vegetables than those who brought lunch from home.
- Only 27% of packed lunches met three of the five requirements mentioned above that every school lunch must contain.
- Packaged foods were the most common item found in packed lunches.
- Packed lunches contained more sodium compared to NSLP guidelines.

Q. So school lunches may be nutritious, but how do they taste?

A. Aramark's team of chefs asks students what favorite foods and flavors they prefer. Through preference surveys and taste tests, students' opinions help to determine which nutritious recipes are both innovative and "kid-friendly" enough to make it onto cafeteria menus.

Q. My child is a vegetarian. Are there any decent school lunch options for her?

A. Nowadays school cafeterias offer a wide variety of choices based on students' input. Aramark plans menus for your children that include daily vegetarian selections designed to meet discriminating tastes and provide high nutritional quality.

Q. How do I know if our school cafeteria has these offerings on a given day?

A. Contact your school cafeteria manager or arrange a meeting with your school nutrition director to make certain your child's specific food needs are being met and to learn if there are additional available options.

¹ Hubbard KL, et al. What's in Children's Backpacks: Foods Brought From Home JADA. 2014; 1424-1431.

² Caruso ML, Cullen KW. Quality and Cost of Student Lunches Brought From Home. JAMA Pediatr. 2015;169(1):86-90.

³ Farris AR, et al. Nutritional Comparison of Packed and School Lunches in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Children Following the Implementation of the 2012-13 National School Lunch Program Standards. J Nutr Educ Behav 2014;46(6): 621-626.



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about a diet and exercise plan that's right for you. [visit myhealthyforlife.com](http://myhealthyforlife.com)



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