

SCHOOL MEAL MYTHS

GET THE FACTS

MYTH: Consuming school meals contributes to childhood obesity.

FACT

Students who eat meals served through the National School Lunch Program are more likely to be at a healthy weight. School meals must meet standards set by the USDA, which are based on the latest nutrition science research and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. School meals require that appropriate portion sizes and calories are provided for specific ages and grade groups.

MYTH: Schools serve junk food for school lunch.

FACT

Meals served under the National School Lunch Program must, by federal regulation, meet nutrition guidelines based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. No more than 30% of calories can come from fat and less than 10% from saturated fat. School lunches provide 1/3 of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, and calories. In addition, at least half of the grain products served in school meals are required to be whole grain rich, which provides students with a variety of nutrients and fiber.

MYTH: Schools don't serve enough fruits or vegetables for lunch.

FACT

School meals serve a rainbow of color! There are required minimums of fruits and vegetables that must be served daily, which means a large selection is usually available. These may be canned, frozen, fresh or dried. Color also matters – school meals are required to provide a variety of colorful vegetables throughout the week, including dark green leafy vegetables, red-orange vegetables, beans, peas and legumes.

MYTH: Schools serve fried, greasy foods.

FACT

Schools may serve French fries, chicken nuggets or pizza at times. However, because the meals are required to meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, they will be lower in fat and saturated fat. Foods are often baked, not fried, made with low-fat or lean ingredients, and served with vegetables, fruit and other options that make each meal balanced and nutritious. In fact, it is uncommon to see a deep fryer in use in a school cafeteria.

MYTH: School meals do not have fresh food and serve all prepackaged food.

FACT

Through programs such as Farm to School and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, school cafeterias across Tennessee are able to partner with local farmers to receive fresh produce, meat, eggs, and dairy products. While some schools serve prepackaged foods, many school nutrition programs are run by culinary professionals, who use fresh products that have undergone less processing. The Smart Snacks program ensures all foods sold at school during the school day (including food sold at school store and in vending machines) are required to meet nutrition standards. In addition, most prepackaged grain products provided by school meals are actually whole grain rich and packed with nutrients and fiber.

Sources:

healthy-food-choices-in-schools.extension.org/10-things-you-dont-know-about-school-food/
haywood.k12.nc.us/school-nutrition/the-myth-of-school-meals/