

Lunches Provided By Schools May Be Healthier Than Lunches Brought From Home

Researchers find that school lunches may be a better choice for kids!

Many parents want their kids to bring lunches from home. They feel lunches from home are healthier than cafeteria food. However, they might be wrong.

Researchers in England evaluated school lunches and hypothesized they may be actually healthier than lunches from home. Students may be better off buying lunch at school!

School Lunch vs. Lunch from Home

In 2009, researchers in England from The School Food Trust decided to research and evaluate school lunches. They wanted to compare cafeteria food to the food in lunches kids brought from home. Researchers spent three months finding out whether kids' lunches are healthier. They observed and recorded everything in the lunches. In total, they studied 3,481 students who brought lunches from home and 6,696 students who bought school lunches.

What they found may be very surprising.

Overall, the researchers found that kids who ate school lunches ate healthier foods!

For example, many more students ate vegetables when they ate school lunch. 66% of students who ate school lunch took servings of vegetables. But only 8% of students who brought lunch from home had vegetables!

The same pattern was seen when researchers studied drinks. Students who brought school lunch did not drink as many sugary drinks. They were also much more likely to drink water.

Lunches from home did have more fruit and calcium, but overall, lunches brought from home contained more fat, more sugar, and more salt. Not what you want your kids eating!

This study wasn't the only one to find that school lunches are better. In 2006 another study was done in England. The lunches of 1,294 children were studied. Again, the researchers found that kids who bring lunches from home didn't have the essential ingredients needed for a healthy diet like vegetables. Few lunches from home contained all five healthy food groups (starch, protein, vegetables, fruit and dairy). And, most lunches from home contained sugary snacks and drinks.

School Lunches Healthier

The researchers all found that school lunches were healthier. The School Food Trust report says, "Lunches provided by schools are more healthy than lunches brought from home."

Researchers say that school lunches are better because schools can control them. Schools can make sure the lunches are healthy. But lunches from home can't be controlled. So students can **and do** bring more drinks and snacks that are high in salt and sugar (foods that are not allowed in school lunches). As a result, students who bring lunches from home typically eat more salt, sugar and fat than those who eat school lunch.

The researchers say, "Ideally, children should be encouraged to [buy] school lunches."

A Bright Future for School Lunch

Even though they are already healthy, school lunches are getting even better! The government is working to make even stronger rules so school lunches will be full of fresh, delicious food. President Obama has just signed a new bill "The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010." This bill will give \$4.5 billion to improving school food. This means that school lunches will be healthier and better-tasting than ever!