

Lunch or Junk?

Health experts get tough on school lunches

It's lunchtime at Hall Memorial School in Connecticut, and 10-year-old Haley is making her way through the food line. Many of her friends are thrilled with the day's lunch selections: pizza and French fries and hot dogs. But Haley feels discouraged. "I use four or five napkins just trying to get the grease off the pizza," she says. "Where are the healthy options?"

Health experts are asking the same question. They say foods high in fat, salt, and sugar should be banned from school lunch programs. This includes some items you might not suspect, like fruit punch, which is loaded with sugar, and macaroni and cheese, which is sky-high in fat and salt. "Children are already consuming too much junk food," says Jen Keller, a dietitian at the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine. "It's important to offer them only healthy items in school."

It's not that health experts want to deprive kids of foods they like best. They just want to help kids avoid many of the health problems that come with eating large quantities of unhealthful food. Today, 15 percent of children ages 6 to 11 are obese, or seriously overweight. That's up from just 6.5 percent in the late 1970s. Poor diet and obesity can cause diseases like type-2 diabetes, which can lead to blindness and kidney problems.

As of a few years ago, this disease was so rare in children that it was called "adult onset diabetes." "Many foods that are offered in cafeterias are linked to these problems," Keller says.

Most schools do offer some healthful foods, but experts say that doesn't solve the problem. "Given a choice, most kids are going to choose junk over something healthy," says Pat Thorton, a psychologist who studies obesity in children.

Thorton and other experts agree that schools and parents need to educate kids about making good food choices, both in and out of school. For example, few kids understand that many popular candies, chips, and sodas come in containers that actually contain two or even three servings. And kids need to become skeptical about food advertisements they see on TV and in magazines. "Just because Beyonce sells Pepsi doesn't mean it's a good product for your body," Thorton says.

Of course some kids already seem to know all of this. "The junk food is tempting," says 10-year-old Tim. "But my parents tell me that if I eat healthy now, I'll have strong bones when I get older."



Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read “Lunch or Junk?” Then fill in the circle next to the best answer for each question.

1. This article is mostly about
 - ☐ A. how to cook a healthful meal.
 - ☐ B. greasy pizza.
 - ☐ C. food in school cafeterias.
 - ☐ D. how to cure diseases.
2. In the second to last paragraph, what does the word *skeptical* mean?
 - ☐ E. overweight
 - ☐ F. hungry
 - ☐ G. doubtful
 - ☐ H. healthy
3. Which of the following is a fact?
 - ☐ I. More children are obese today than in the late 1970s.
 - ☐ J. Hot dogs and fries taste good.
 - ☐ K. People should never eat junk food.
 - ☐ L. Soda vending machines should not be allowed in schools.
4. According to the article, who should be responsible for children’s healthy diets?
 - ☐ M. children
 - ☐ N. parents
 - ☐ O. teachers
 - ☐ P. all of the above
5. From reading the article, you can tell that the percentage of overweight children a little over 20 years ago was
 - ☐ Q. 15 percent.
 - ☐ R. 30 percent.
 - ☐ S. 6.5 percent.
 - ☐ T. 10 percent.
6. Why did the author write this story?
 - ☐ U. to discuss his favorite meal
 - ☐ V. to educate you about eating healthy
 - ☐ W. to teach you how to exercise
 - ☐ X. to tell you about type-2 diabetes

Write It Out!

Do you think junk food should be eliminated from school lunches? Why or why not? Answer these questions by writing a paragraph. Include three ideas. For each idea, write at least two sentences that provide supporting details.

Bonus: Expand your paragraph into a five-paragraph essay.

ANSWERS

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1. C 2. G 3. I 4. P 5. S 6. V

Write It Out! Answers will vary.