

News Release

**Faye Malek, Family Living Educator
Manitowoc County UW-Extension
P.O. Box 1150, 4319 Expo Drive
Manitowoc, WI 54221-1150**

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Schools promote healthy eating in and out of the classroom

Students are learning about healthful eating and applying what they learn as they choose food and beverages throughout the school day. Classroom instruction on nutrition and health can be strengthened or sabotaged by food and beverages that are made available to students during and after school.

Several research studies have shown that improving a school's food environment can have a positive effect on the quality of students' diets. School cafeterias are the most visible part of the school food environment, but opportunities to offer healthful food and beverage choices don't stop in the cafeteria.

Following are additional ways to enhance the quality of foods and beverages at school:

- Whole-grain foods, low-fat milk and fresh local produce can be featured more often in meals that are served at school such as lunches, ala carte options, and school breakfasts.
- Freshly cut-up pieces of fruit are a wholesome and delicious alternative to cookies and candy for snacks and party or holiday treats in the classroom.
- When vending machine contracts are negotiated, provisions can be made for more nutritious items such as water, milk, juice, fruit, nuts, bagels and yogurt. These items can also be featured in the school store and the concession stands for athletic events.
- Consider rewards that are given to students who win the spelling bee or the neatest desk competition. Can candy and fast food coupons be replaced with non-food rewards? In a recent survey of Madison middle schools, students said their favorite rewards were free time in class, outdoor activities, playing a game in class, and receiving tokens for prizes. Other options are movie coupons, stickers, and making a special selection for the class such as a topic for next week's art project or writing assignment.
- Many after-school programs offer snacks for kids in the late afternoon. Smoothies, cheese and crackers, mini sandwiches, or cut-up vegetables with dip are nutritious and satisfying.
- Schools that accept advertising from financial sponsors to support school equipment and other functions should have a process for examining the health and nutrition impact of in-school promotions.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), establishing healthy eating habits at a young age is critical to proper growth and development. It also makes it more likely that beneficial habits will continue into adulthood. In addition, healthy eating helps children do well in school and it helps prevent health problems in later life, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer and stroke.

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