

Food for Thought

You're sitting in your last class before lunch, daydreaming about sinking your teeth into a juicy hamburger and golden fries. That big, soft brownie would taste scrumptious too.

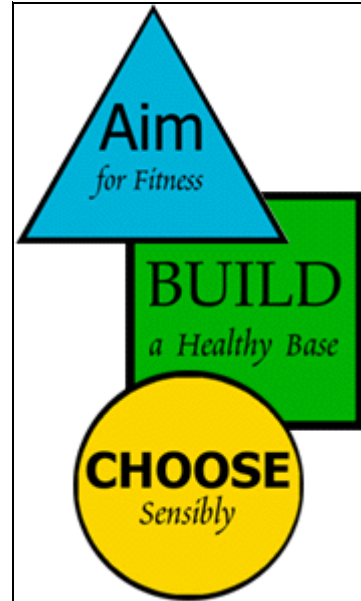
Hold on! The hamburger served in your cafeteria isn't an all-beef patty but a blueberry burger. The fries are actually baked, low-salt sweet-potato wedges. There is no brownie for dessert today. Instead, how about a nice granola bar? What's happened to your school lunch? It's getting a more **nutritious**¹ makeover.

More and more kids around the United States are overweight and out of shape. Experts say that 15 out of every 100 American children aged 6 to 11 weigh more than they should. The experts blame poor diets and lack of exercise. Research shows that many overweight kids become overweight adults with **chronic**² diseases.

To **combat**³ that problem, schools around the country are making an effort to change kids' eating habits by offering more healthful choices at lunchtime.

Out With the Bad

Many school districts in the United States have already banned vending machines that sell soft drinks and other junk foods. Some people want the U.S. Congress to improve the federal school lunch program.



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These guidelines will help you build healthful eating patterns and take action for good health.

¹ **nutritious:** nourishing, healthful; providing nutrients needed to promote growth and development

² **chronic:** continuing or occurring again and again for a long time

³ **combat:** to struggle against; to strive to reduce or eliminate

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The program, run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, feeds 27 million children every day. Nutritionists, however, say those lunches are too fatty and have too many calories. They want lawmakers to change the federal department's guidelines for school lunches.

Some schools are so concerned with the health of their students that they are not waiting for Congress to act. For example, school officials in New York City are cutting the amount of sugar, fat, and salt in school lunches.

That means beef ravioli, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, and ice cream might disappear from lunch trays. Instead, cafeterias will offer vegetables five days a week.

Fresh Approach

Food that is good for you doesn't have to taste bad. Just ask the students at Brekke School in Oxnard, California. Students there can now choose from a menu of only healthful food items. Nothing is fried. Fizzy, sugary soft drinks are out. Skim milk and juices are in.

The school serves giant tacos made with soft tortilla shells, not the hard, deep-fried kind. Toppings include lettuce, broccoli, and refried beans.

At Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana, Caitlin Galligan, 17, thinks it's a good idea for school lunches to be healthful and tasty. "I eat the school lunch every day, and I usually choose the hot entree," she said. "I like the food."

Other students disagree. "Teens want to eat fries and fattier stuff," Erin Meyer, a pizza-loving, soda-drinking tenth grader in Atlanta, recently told a reporter from the Cox News Service. "They don't care if it's good for you."

Berry Good Burgers?

Erin probably wouldn't like one food item that may soon debut on many school lunch menus--the blueberry burger. Researchers in Maine are stirring a blueberry mixture into beef, chicken, and turkey patties to boost the sandwich's nutritional content. Health experts say

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blueberries make burgers juicier and tastier. As a bonus, blueberries contain a cancer-fighting substance.

If blueberries aren't to your liking, how about prunes? Some students in Colorado, Maryland, and Florida are biting into burgers that contain that fruit. School kids in 17 other states eat cherry burgers.

"You don't see the cherry, and you don't taste the cherry," said Ray Pleva, a Michigan butcher who makes cherry-meat products. Pleva said many people at first are turned off by the idea of his fruit burgers. However, once they buy them and grill them, they say, "Wow, that was great!"

What's for Lunch?

This table shows what percentage of elementary schools have menus that offer each food item daily.

Milk	100%
Vegetables	94%
Combination Entrée (includes cold-cut sandwiches hamburgers, pizza)	90%
Fruits and Juices	87%
Grains and Breads (not part of combination entrée)	55%
Meats/Meat Alternatives (not part of combination entrée)	31%