

RISE IN CHILDHOOD OBESITY HAS RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT SCHOOL LUNCH NUTRITION

10 Easy Tips for Packing Healthy School Lunches

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIF. – Sept. 8, 2004 -- The return of a new school year brings yet another health concern for parents – childhood obesity.

And the next battleground in the war against this growing health epidemic may be over the school lunch. An understanding of the temptations for the students, and a few simple suggestions for packing lunches, may help win the battle.

Julia Ackerson, nutritionist for House of Bread Franchising (UIR:HQA0132, www.houseofbread.com), welcomes the recent concern over the impact unhealthy school lunches are having on the rise of childhood obesity.

“The school lunch issue has been overlooked by parents and school officials for years,” says Ackerson. “It’s a tough battle for parents because school lunches have become less nutritionally sound over the years with popular fattening fast-food items dominating the lunch lines.”

“The real battle has to start early, educating children in the early-elementary school years about the value of nutrition. Children can be taught at home that eating healthy can be fun, tastes good, and helps their minds and bodies grow strong,” she added.

Fortunately, school lunches are coming under closer scrutiny by the government and local school officials.

Sparked by the alarming rise in childhood obesity (17 percent of U.S. children between 6 and 19 are considered seriously overweight, which is triple the percentage in 1980), the government recently issued new nutrition recommendations urging people eat

more whole grain foods in place of refined foods or white bread.

A report released recently by the National Institutes of Health stated, “left unabated, the escalating rates of obesity in the U.S. population will place a severe burden on the nation’s health and health-care system.”

Ackerson said that peer pressure from classmates, and school menus that feature tasty fast-food items and sodas, are factors that can lead to children’s unhealthy lunch decisions.

“Even if you send your child to school with a healthy lunch, that doesn’t mean they will eat it,” Ackerson explains. “The reality is that children like to trade lunches with their friends. Kids love sweets and will easily give in to taste temptation. That’s why it’s important for kids to be taught why healthy lunches are good. A parent’s best defense is to include items such as fruit, vegetables and other tasty and healthy snacks in a child’s lunch, guaranteeing they will benefit nutritionally if they keep at least part of their lunch.”

Making sure your child gets off to a nutritious start in the morning with a breakfast including whole grain wheat toast is also helpful, added Ackerson.

“We recognize the importance of nutrition at all of our stores,” says Sheila McCann, founder and owner of the House of Bread bakeries. “That’s why we have a nutritionist on staff at our company headquarters to guide our nutritional choices, and to make sure our franchisees are well informed about health issues such as childhood obesity that affect our customers.”

Ackerson offers 10 easy tips for parents to create a healthy lunch for their children including:

Start all sandwiches with a healthy wheat bread made from natural ingredients and whole grains.

Switch from ham, bologna, salami, pastrami or corned beef, or other fatty luncheon meats, to low-fat alternatives like turkey breast or roasted chicken.

Leave the cheese off sandwiches, unless it's low-fat or fat-free cheese.

Sneak vegetables – like lettuce or slices of cucumber, tomato, green pepper, roasted peppers, zucchini or sweet onion – onto sandwiches.

Encourage your child to choose 1% or fat-free milk.

Include at least one serving of fruit in every lunch.

Limit cookies, snack cakes, doughnuts, brownies and other sweet baked goods.

Pack baked chips, pretzels, Cheerios, bread sticks or other low-fat crackers instead of potato, corn, tortilla or other chips made with oil.

If you pack juice, make sure it's 100% juice.

Include a bottle of water. Encourage your children to choose water whenever possible.

For more information about the House of Bread bakeries please call (800) 545-5146 or visit the company Web site at www.houseofbread.com.

About House of Bread

Sheila McCann opened the first House of Bread in San Luis Obispo, Calif., in 1996. In 1999, she began a national franchise program that has since expanded to five states. All House of Bread recipes rely on fresh, high-quality ingredients, such as the high-protein wheat berries that are ground into flour daily at each House of Bread location. In addition to the original San Luis Obispo location, House of Bread franchises can be found in Fremont and Sacramento, Calif.; Westminster, Colo.; Plymouth, Mich.; Reno, Nev.; Flower Mound, Texas and Salt Lake City, Utah. Additional stores will open soon in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, Ohio and Washington.