



PUTTING SCHOOL-DAY CALORIES INTO PERSPECTIVE

Support and Promote the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*

Good nutrition for kids is based on the same principles as good nutrition for adults. Everyone needs the same types of nutrients: vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, protein, fat and water. What's different is the amount of specific nutrients we need.

Some nutrients (protein, carbohydrates, and fat) contain calories and some (water, vitamins, and minerals) don't. Calories aren't a bad thing; we all need calories from food to stay alive. On the other hand, many adults and children are eating too many calories, which can lead to an unhealthy weight. In Michigan, more than 30% of children are considered overweight or obese, and, once kids become overweight, they are likely to remain overweight their whole lives.

When a school follows the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* for foods offered at school they are paying close attention to the calories in those foods in order to supply students with enough calories, from the right kinds of healthy food, without providing too many calories.

Below are answers to common questions parents and adults have about calories, the amount of calories in school meals and foods served at school, and high and low calorie foods.

Q: What's a calorie?

A: Food and drinks supply the body with calories, which more simply put, is energy. Whether we're kids or adults when we eat too many calories, or don't use that calorie-energy up through daily activity or exercise, we gain weight; and, when we eat fewer calories than we need, we lose weight. Many adults are confused about how many calories kids need and believe they need double or triple the calories that adults do. That's not true.

Q: How many calories do kids need to eat in a day?

A. In general, according to the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) children ages 4-13 need 1400-2000 calories per day, and children ages 14-18 need 2000-2400 calories per day. Boys usually need a few more calories than girls and the more active a child is, the more calories he/she needs. If you want more specific information go to www.choosemyplate.gov where you can enter your personal information and get a healthy food plan with a calorie range that is right for you.

Q: How many calories does a typical school lunch or school breakfast provide?

A: Schools that operate the National School Lunch or School Breakfast program must monitor the calories in each meal. Generally, a school breakfast for an elementary school child, if all of the components are eaten will provide them with 350-500 calories, which is about ¼ of the calories they need in a day. A school lunch will provide them with 550-650 calories, which is about 1/3 of the calories they need in a day. That means if children eat breakfast and lunch at school, when they get home they will already have eaten over half of the calories they need in a day. Also keep in mind that in many cases, children are eating other sources of calories at school such as food at parties and celebrations, food brought from home for snacks, food that might be given out as a reward such as candy or an ice cream party, food purchased from the a la carte line etc. All these calories add up!

Q: Should parents count the calories their kids are eating?

A: No. Parents don't need to count calories for kids, or talk to their kids about how many calories they are eating, but it's a good idea to know how many calories kids need to grow and to stay healthy. Knowing that helps parents put into perspective the calorie information on food labels or other forms of nutrition information.

Q: Are all high calorie foods bad?

A: No. Some foods that are calorie-dense such as low-fat cheese and nuts also contain a significant amount of nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Parents should make an effort to offer kids healthy, nutrient-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein foods, and low-fat dairy foods. Foods that should be offered less often include high-calorie, non-nutritious foods such as soda and other sugar-sweetened drinks, high-fat meats, candy, cookies, chips and sugary cereals. The healthiest foods are the least processed and come from the five main food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains (preferably whole grains), protein foods and dairy.

Q: What about the calories in snacks?

A: Children usually eat a big portion of their daily calories from snacks—so it's really important that snacks be healthy. If a snack is served as part of the After School Snack program there are calorie guidelines schools must follow. If snacks are brought to school from home, there are no calorie requirements. However, it is recommended that schools follow the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* for foods served outside of school meals, when deciding what types of snacks will be served or allowed to be brought from home. With a little knowledge and effort, choosing healthy snacks is easy.

| INSTEAD OF... | CHOOSE THIS: |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Chips and dip | <u>Whole grain</u> crackers, pretzels, carrot sticks, and hummus or bean dip |
| Cookies or candy | Fresh or Canned Fruit and low-fat yogurt |
| Cereal bars that are low in fiber | Cereal bars that are made with <u>whole grains</u> , and that have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. |
| Soda or sugar-sweetened drinks | Water, no-calorie flavored water, 100% juice in 8 oz. servings or less, water/100% juice blends, or lowfat or fat-free white or flavored milk. |