

Mama, don't let your babies grow up to be fatties

BY KATE MORSE, CCH

Let me tell you about my first pizza. I was eight, and in the school cafeteria. The pizza was a flat, damp thing. I went at it with a fork. Although there were Italian kids around to provide a better example, we all attacked our pizzas with forks. I ate pizza with a fork until I went to a big city college and my pal Maria Travagliese said, "What are you? Stupid?"

The point is that we develop our eating habits young. That's why I want to discuss school lunch programs.

American schools serve meals and snacks under federally subsidized USDA programs. There are many good things to be said about this, including the fact that, for some kids, this is the only food they get. The schools don't get paid a heck of a lot to dish it out. Depending on the over-all percentage of kids they feed, and whether those meals are partially or entirely free to the kid, schools receive from 23-cents to \$2.49 per meal. By and large, the foods the government considers reimbursable make nutritional sense—fruits, veggies, good carbs, dairy and meat: the Food Guide Pyramid items most Americans continue to ignore.

Research indicates that only 2% of kids age two to nineteen eat a diet guided by the Pyramid. Only 25% of teens eat five or more fruits or vegetables per day. This is after people from the Oregon chapters of the American Heart Association and American Diabetic Association and nutritionists and child health experts at Oregon Health and Sciences University all got together in 2001 and launched Healthy People 2010. They've had slim success. Our kids are getting fatter.

Part of the problem might be the examples kids get at school. Under the reimbursable program, doughnuts and toaster pastries are allowed if they're "enriched" or "whole grain." To my thinking, which is admittedly prone to annoyance by all things governmental, serving toaster pastries at school is like launching a cheerleading squad, urging kids to EAT TOASTER PASTRIES!

Nobody looks for the "enriched" or "whole grain" language at the store. Do whole grain toaster pastries even exist? Maybe they're in the mixed message aisle, next to the chocolate-flavored breakfast cereal.

Juice is reimbursable. Except at breakfast, where 100% juice is mandated, "juice" need only be 50% juice. In one way, this is a good thing: if the "juice" is 50% water, a kid is getting 50% less sugar, because juice is mostly sugar and pretty color. On the other hand, what are we losing when we reimburse a "food" that's 50% water? We lose the chance to educate the kid to want a piece of fruit.

The program really falls down in terms of modeling health-optimizing consumption: eat tons of fresh fruits and vegetables. For reimbursement purposes, a "salad" is a "salad" if it has two vegetables in it, including a mere eighth cup of the second vegetable. Therefore, a "salad" is iceberg lettuce and three cherry tomatoes, or iceberg lettuce and a few strips of carrot. An eighth of a cup is nothing, people. Depending on the age of the kid, a vegetable serving is a quarter to three quarters of a cup. Is this six string beans? Is it the amount of cabbage required to lightly wallpaper an i-Pod?

Currently, McDonalds, General Mills, Con Agra and the like own our food development, consumption and food politics culture. Our kids would be better educated if schools taught kids the health consequences of sugar juices, toaster pastries and fat-laden foods. Educated kids could actually learn to decline Big Macs and supersize fries in favor of healthier fare

Your kids don't like vegetables, you say? If Japanese kids crave hijiki, and African kids happily eat pulpy cassava, taste must be a matter of culture.

Kate Morse is a Certified Classical Homeopath in the Applegate who advises people to eat a salad the size of their head every day.

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