

Mealtime is a time for learning

Mealtime, whether at school or at home, presents many learning opportunities for kids. They can learn about new foods, nutrition, healthy lifestyles and cultures other than their own. They can also practice making smart decisions.

A healthy variety

A wide variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, and whole grains like brown rice or wheat bread, provide balanced nutrition for kids. Our school offers lunch menus that incorporate many different kinds of foods, both to provide a healthy balance of nutrients to kids and to keep their interest in school lunch. When kids eat the same meals every day, they could develop vitamin deficiencies that affect their ability to grow and learn.

Introducing new foods

A varied menu may include foods that students may not recognize initially. Fear of the unknown may hold them back from trying a meal. Because kids are so impressionable, it's important for adults to encourage them with their words and actions. Let them see you eating a meal of unfamiliar foods. Tell them it's good or "you're going to like it," even if it's a food that you may not personally like. Everyone's tastes are different and kids need to be given permission to experiment and discover what they like. Let them see you try something new and not be afraid. Consider rewarding them with a sticker or a trading card when they eat something that they may think looks "yucky" because it's a color they may not like.

Greater cultural awareness

Kids can also learn about other cultures at mealtime. When our school serves ethnic meals, students can experience cultures that may be different from their own. When these meals are served, it provides an opportunity to learn about the people, geographic origins, history and traditions of the race.

Understanding the importance of nutrition

Even more traditional American foods provide a learning opportunity. When served a hamburger or chicken, kids can gain an understanding of different kinds of protein and the importance of protein in a diet. Or, when a salad that includes a variety of ingredients is served, students can learn about each of the ingredients and the wide variety of vitamins provided by the salad and how they help the body grow and function.

Fostering decision-making skills

Mealtime is also a great time to teach kids good decision-making skills. Do they want fruit or a cookie for dessert? Do they want chips or beans and rice? Do they want chocolate milk or soda pop? With some instruction and reinforcement, and an understanding of what is better for their bodies, kids will begin to make healthier decisions more frequently.

Kids are constantly learning, through observation, encouragement and instruction, whether from teachers, parents, other adults or friends. Fuel their hunger to learn while you satisfy their physical hunger.