

Children's packed lunches: Are they even worse than Turkey Twizzlers?

January 10 2007

Packed lunches taken to school by 7-year olds are even less healthy than school meals used to be before Jamie Oliver set out to reform them.

The Children of the 90s study, based at the University of Bristol, revealed today that in the year 2000, school meals were every bit as bad as a Jamie Oliver suggested - but that children given packed lunches instead were even worse off nutritionally.

Dr Pauline Emmett, Nutritionist and Dietician, who is in charge of the nutritional part of Children of the 90s said: 'We compared nutrients in foods brought by hundreds of children in their packed lunches to recommendations and found that they fell short in important nutrients like potassium and zinc and were much too high in sugar and saturated fat. The foods eaten in the rest of the day did not compensate for this.

"Children who ate school dinners had higher intakes of protein and most vitamins and minerals, and lower intakes of sugar and saturated fat.

"The Food Standards Agency recommends that packed lunches should ideally contain a starchy food, a protein food, a dairy item, a vegetable/salad and a fruit. Only 3.5% of packed lunches did contain them all and almost half (44.3%) included 2 or less. Packets of crisps and chocolate biscuits were the most commonly eaten foods after white bread with some type of fat spread.

"Fruit and vegetable /salad intakes were very low in packed lunches –

only 41% had a fruit and 16% a salad vegetable. These food groups were also low in the cooked school dinners - something which Jamie Oliver's reforms have tried to address, not always with support from children and parents! On average children were eating half the amount of fruit and vegetables that they need."

Dr Emmett suggests that "We need to be working towards a change of attitude to the foods we eat ourselves and particularly to the foods we are willing to give our children to eat."

Source: University of Bristol

Citation: Children's packed lunches: Are they even worse than Turkey Twizzlers? (2007, January 10) retrieved 20 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-01-children-lunches-worse-turkey-twizzlers.html>

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