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## The School Lunch Study

If you're going to get children to eat healthier foods, you have to employ the same tactics that food manufacturers, grocery stores, and restaurants use: make it look visually appealing and display it in such a way as to help them make the healthy choice first. Of course, it must taste good but if they never put it on the plate, they'll never know if they like the taste. With that in mind, researchers selected 14 elementary and middle schools in low-income, inner-city locations with over 2,600 children to participate in a school lunch study (1).

There were two different interventions. In the first, schools were randomly selected to have a professional chef work with school cafeteria staff. The objective was to create recipes that improved the taste of foods as well as teach school cafeteria staff better culinary skills. Three new recipes were introduced every week in the chef-assisted schools. Recipes used foods typically available to schools, including whole grains, fresh and frozen produce, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, and seasonings with low sodium and sugar.



The other school districts maintained the status quo for three months. Researchers assessed consumption by weighing serving portions before eating and wasted food on the plates afterward.

After three months, some schools from both the chef-assisted group and the control group were randomly converted to a smart café approach. Food placement affects what kids put on their plates, so vegetables and fruits were placed at the beginning of the line instead of the end when their trays might be full with other choices.

Did the experiments work? Were children eating more vegetables and fruit? The short answer is yes. I'll give you the complete results tomorrow including something that will help your children eat more vegetables and maybe you as well.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

**Reference:** JAMA Pediatr. 2015 Mar 23. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2014.3805.

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