



April 2, 2015 – Grand Rapids, MI

## School Lunch Study Results

Today we finish our look at a recent study designed to see if kids will eat more vegetables and fruits in school lunches (1). Over the seven-month study, there were four scenarios:

- Schools with chef-assisted meals
- Smart café approaches
- Chef-assisted meals with smart café
- Control schools that did not change their approach to school lunches

If you want to guess the results just based on logic, you would have been correct that the chef-assisted meals, with and without the smart café approach worked best. The schools that had chef-assisted meals for three months selected 8% more vegetables when compared with controls. Those that had chef-assisted meals for the entire seven months of the study were 20% more likely to select fruit and 30% more likely to pick vegetables than control schools. Taste matters.



But there's another important lesson to take from this study: it took seven months of repeated exposure to chef-assisted meals before the kids really increased their selections of vegetables and fruits. The researchers emphasized that it took repeated exposure to better prepared vegetables and fruit before children started to really change their selection; like most of us in new situations, they resisted change. Over time, with continued exposure to better tasting vegetables and fruits, the children changed their habits for food selection.

Keep that in mind when you try to get your children to eat more vegetables at home. You may not be a gourmet cook, but you can try different ways of preparing the vegetables in a healthy way, knowing it's going to take time for them to bite, pun intended. Who knows? Maybe vegetable-resistant adults may just decide they like vegetables as well.

Back to where we began: find out what's going on in your school district. Spending a little money on chefs to develop better recipes with the food available in your schools can help the health of your children long-term. It's well worth the investment. Can you find chefs who want to work with schools? I'm guessing you can. If you watch competition shows on the Food Network, you know there are many chefs who enjoy the challenge of taking a list of foods and creating something delicious; you probably have some in your town. Just don't expect immediate success.

The healthy diet kids can learn in schools, the very place where they're supposed to learn, can last them a lifetime. A healthy lifetime. Don't allow your school to be short sighted and misguided. Get after them.

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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