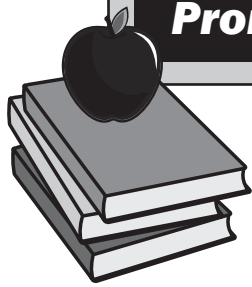


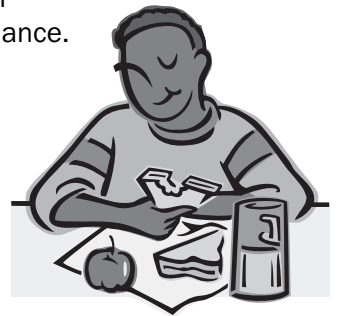
Alternatives to Food as Reward

Promoting a Healthy School Environment



Food is commonly used to reward students for good behavior and academic performance. It's an easy, inexpensive and powerful tool to bring about immediate short-term behavior change. Yet, using food as reward has many negative consequences that go far beyond the short-term benefits of good behavior or performance.

Research clearly demonstrates that healthy kids learn better. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools must provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Finding alternatives to food rewards is an important part of providing a healthy school environment.



"Rewarding children with unhealthy foods in school undermines our efforts to teach them about good nutrition. It's like teaching children a lesson on the importance of not smoking, and then handing out ashtrays and lighters to the kids who did the best job listening."
Marlene Schwartz, PhD, Co-Director, Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Yale University

Consequences of Using Food as Reward



Compromises Classroom Learning: Schools are institutions designed to teach and model appropriate behaviors and skills to children. Nutrition principles taught in the classroom are meaningless if they are contradicted by rewarding children with candy and other sweets. It's like saying, "You need to eat healthy foods to feel and do your best, but when you behave or perform your best, you will be rewarded with unhealthy food." Classroom learning about nutrition will remain strictly theoretical if schools regularly model unhealthy behaviors.

Contributes to Poor Health: Foods commonly used as rewards (like candy and cookies) can contribute to health problems for children, e.g., obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cavities. Food rewards provide unneeded calories and displace healthier food choices.



Encourages Overconsumption of Unhealthy Foods: Foods used as rewards are typically "empty calorie" foods — high in fat, sugar and salt with little nutritional value. Decreasing the availability of empty calorie foods is one strategy schools can use to address the current childhood obesity epidemic.

Contributes to Poor Eating Habits: Rewarding with food can interfere with children learning to eat in response to hunger and satiety cues. This teaches kids to eat when they are not hungry as a reward to themselves, and may contribute to the development of disordered eating.^{2,3}

Increases Preference for Sweets: Food preferences for both sweet and non-sweet food increase significantly when foods are presented as rewards. This can teach children to prefer unhealthy foods.^{3,4}

About 20 percent of children are overweight.¹ Over the past three decades, the childhood obesity rate has more than doubled for preschool children aged 2-5 years and adolescents aged 12-19 years, and it has more than tripled for children aged 6-11 years.



What Schools Can Do

Ideas for Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward 5,6

Schools can help promote a healthy learning environment by using nonfood rewards. The ideas below are just a beginning and can be modified for different ages. Be creative, and don't forget the simple motivation of recognizing students for good work or behavior.

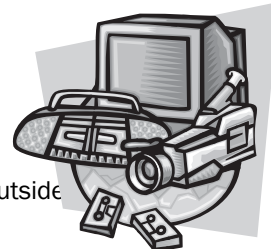
Elementary School Students

- Make deliveries to office
- Teach class
- Sit by friends
- Eat lunch with teacher or principal
- Eat lunch outdoors with the class
- Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
- Private lunch in classroom with a friend
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Play a favorite game or do puzzles
- Stickers, pencils, bookmarks
- Certificates
- Fun video
- Extra recess
- Walk with the principal or teacher
- Fun physical activity break
- School supplies
- Trip to treasure box filled with nonfood items (stickers, tattoos, pencils, erasers, bookmarks, desktop tents)
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Paperback book
- Show-and-tell
- Bank system - Earn play money for privileges
- Teacher or volunteer reads special book to class
- Teacher performs special skill (singing, cart wheel, guitar playing, etc.)
- Read outdoors or enjoy class outdoors
- Have extra art time
- Have "free choice" time at end of the day or end of class period
- Listen with headset to a book on audiotape
- Items that can only be used on special occasions (special art supplies, computer games, toys)



Middle School Students

- Sit with friends
- Listen to music while working at desk
- Five-minute chat break at end of class
- Reduced homework or "no homework" pass
- Extra credit
- Fun video
- Fun brainteaser activities
- Computer time
- Assemblies
- Field trips
- Eat lunch outside or have class outside



High School Students

- Extra credit
- Fun video
- Reduced homework
- Late homework pass
- Donated coupons to video stores, music stores or movies
- Drawings for donated prizes among students who meet certain grades standards



Share what works! Let us know your strategies to motivate students so we can share with others.

For more information on a healthy school environment, contact Susan Fiore, MS, RD, Nutrition Education Coordinator at susan.fiore@ct.gov or (860) 807-2075.

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- 1 Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, McDowell MA, Tabak CJ, Flegal KM. Prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States, 1999-2004. *JAMA* 295:1549-1555. 2006.
- 2 Puhl R. and Schwartz, MB (2003). If you are good you can have a cookie: The link between childhood food rules and adult eating behaviors. *Eating Behaviors*, 4, 283-293
- 3 Birch LL. Development of Food Preferences. *Annu Rev Nutr* 1999, 19:41-62
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- 5 Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward. Michigan State University Extension, 2003. <http://www.tn.fcs.msue.msu.edu/foodrewards.pdf>
- 6 Non-Food Ways to Raise Funds and Reward a Job Well Done. Texas Department of Agriculture, 2004. http://www.squaremeals.org/vgn/tada/files/2348/3614_1034_NonFoodRewards.pdf

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Connecticut State Department of Education

Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services and Child/Family/School Partnerships



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ALTERNATIVES TO USING FOOD AS A REWARD

At school, home, and throughout the community kids are offered food as a reward for “good” behavior. Often these foods have little or no nutritional value but are easy, inexpensive, and can bring about short-term behavior change.

There are many disadvantages to using food as a reward:

- It undermines nutrition education being taught in the school environment.
- It encourages overconsumption of foods high in added sugar and fat.
- It teaches kids to eat when they’re not hungry as a reward to themselves.

Kids learn preferences for foods made available to them, including those that are unhealthy.¹ Poor food choices and inadequate physical activity contribute to overweight and obesity. Currently, obesity among kids is at epidemic levels and can often lead to serious health problems.²

1. Birch LL. Development of Food Preferences. Annu. Rev. Nutr. 1999, 19:41-62.

2. Ogden CL, Flegal KM, Carroll MD, and Johnson CL. Prevalence and Trends in Overweight Among US Children and Adolescents, 1999-2000. JAMA, October 9, 2002 Vol 288, No. 14.

Students Learn What They Live

Kids naturally enjoy eating healthy and being physically active. Schools and communities need to provide them with an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Below are some alternatives for students to enjoy instead of being offered food as a reward at school.

ZERO-COST ALTERNATIVES

- Sit by friends
- Watch a video
- Read outdoors
- Teach the class
- Have extra art time
- Enjoy class outdoors
- Have an extra recess
- Play a computer game
- Read to a younger class
- Get a no homework pass
- Make deliveries to the office
- Listen to music while working
- Play a favorite game or puzzle
- Earn play money for privileges
- Walk with a teacher during lunch
- Eat lunch outdoors with the class
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Eat lunch with a teacher or principal
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Get “free choice” time at the end of the day
- Listen with a headset to a book on audiotape
- Have a teacher perform special skills (i.e. sing)
- Have a teacher read a special book to the class



LOW-COST ALTERNATIVES

- Select a paperback book
- Enter a drawing for donated prizes
- Take a trip to the treasure box (non-food items)
- Get stickers, pencils, and other school supplies
- Receive a video store or movie theatre coupon
- Get a set of flash cards printed from a computer
- Receive a “mystery pack” (notepad, folder, sports cards, etc.)

IDEAS FROM MICHIGAN TEACHERS

GAME DAY: “I have my students earn letters to spell game day...after the letters have been earned, we play reading or phonics-type board games. The kids beg for Game Day!”

FRIDAY FREE TIME: “I give my students thirty minutes at the beginning of the week and they can earn or lose free time according to their behavior. I use a timer and turn it on (they can hear it) if they are too loud working, lining up, etc. I add time when their behavior is good. Adding time is the most effective. I save time by not waiting for them to settle down so I don’t feel bad about the free time.”





Classroom Reward Ideas

Northwoods Dental Project
Serving Forest, Oneida and Vilas Counties

Alternatives to using food as a reward

Promote better health with these classroom reward ideas:

Kids are often offered food or beverage as a reward for "good" behavior. There are disadvantages to using food as a reward:

1. Teaches kids to eat when they aren't hungry as a reward to themselves.
2. It undermines nutrition education being taught in school.
3. Increases acid production in the mouth increasing risk of tooth decay.

Here are some Healthy reward ideas:

- Give a "free choice" time at the end of the day
- Listening to music while working
- Sit by friends

- Have the teacher read a book to the class
- Enjoy extra art time
- Have class outdoors
- Give a "No Homework" Pass
- Earn extra recess
- Play a computer game
- Play board games
- Read to a younger class
- Listen to an audio book
- Watch a movie
- Have a teacher perform (sing or play an instrument)
- Take a trip to the treasure box (filled with stickers, pencils, bookmarks, etc...)
- Choose one student from each class to walk with the Principal at lunch.



Remember Healthy Kids = Better Learning

Include activity in your classroom routine:

- * Take fitness or stretch breaks: jog in place
- * Combine activity to classroom learning
- * Encourage students to be active outside of school
- * Role model by sharing ways you are active
- * Schedule recess every day
- * Encourage active games during recess

Nutrition Resources:

www.actionforhealthykids.org

Check out:

www.shapingamericasyouth.org for more resources about programs, policy & funding opportunities

Oral Health Resources:

Children's Health Alliance of WI: www.chawisconsin.org

Northwoods Dental Project: www.vilaspublichealth.com

Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services: www.dhs.wisconsin.gov

Adapted from Forest County Health Dept. "School Solutions" flyer.

Snacks should be:

Tasty: so they are enjoyable

Quiet: so classmates aren't disturbed

Neat: so desks & classrooms stay clean

Good for Bodies & Minds: so students can do their best

Small: to "hold you over" until the next meal

Kept Cold: if needed

** Beware of food allergies, which can be very serious.*

For Fund-raising efforts consider these ideas:

Sales Ideas:

Emergency or first aid kits
Flowers, plants or bulbs
Gift wrap and ribbons
Milk Mustache photos
Note cards
Picture frames
School art
School event calendars

School logo merchandise
Seasonal decorations/fruit
Stadium seats and blankets
Veggie trays at concessions

Competition Ideas:

3 on 3 Basketball, Golf or
Tennis Tournaments
Fun run/walk
Horseshoe Pitching

Lip-sync contest
Parent vs. Student games
Scavenger hunt
Sports Clinics
Teachers vs. Students
Variety nights

Other ideas:

Book fair
Bowling Night

Car Wash
Exercise Equipment
Outdoor Pet wash
Pet photos
Singing grams
Skate Night
Spelling bee
Student-for-hire Day
Toothbrushes with logo