



"We serve education every day."

Fat in school foods: Where'd it go?

It's all over the news: Obesity is now the biggest health concern facing American children today. Since obese children often become obese adults, this problem must be dealt with swiftly and with great dedication. In a society where "bigger is better" when it comes to portions, the challenge of slimming down the population is a daunting one. However, there are positive strides being made to halt this epidemic. Recently, New York City just passed a ban on trans fats in all of its restaurants. Fast food restaurants are switching to trans fat free oils for frying, and schools are cracking down on high fat foods and snacks. Families are being encouraged by doctors and health educators to adapt healthier lifestyles including a heart healthy diet that is low in saturated and trans fats. In order to make changes for your family, it is important to know the difference between the "good" fats and the "bad" fats:

- **Saturated Fats:** primarily come from animals. Any fat that is solid at room temperature, such as butter, contains saturated fat. Other sources include meat, cheese, cream, and whole milk.
- **Trans Fats:** formed when hydrogen is added to a vegetable oil to make a more solid fat like shortening or margarine. Sources include commercial baked goods, snack foods, stick margarine, and deep fried foods.
- **Monounsaturated Fats:** come from plant sources. Sources include olive and canola oils as well as nuts.
- **Polyunsaturated Fats:** sources include fatty fish such as salmon, flaxseed, and walnuts.

One of the main goals of school foodservice is to decrease the dietary fat content of the meals we offer. With new guidelines leading the way, gone are some of the traditional foods that are often associated with school lunch. For example, it was once common for french fries to be offered daily in many schools. Now, deep fat fryers have been removed from most local school kitchens. Potato products are now mostly oven baked with minimal frying allowed only at the high school level. Recipes have been modified as well. Macaroni and cheese, gravies, sauces, and stews have all been made over to be lower in fat. Dressings and salads are made with low fat mayonnaise and all snack foods, including ice cream, must now meet strict fat and sugar guidelines as well as be trans fat free. Although it may sound restrictive at first, our goal is not to eliminate all fats but to encourage students to eat less of the saturated and trans fats that are damaging to their health.

As the obesity epidemic continues, local school food service will continue to make changes and improvements to the items that we offer in order to improve the health and well being of our students. However, it is important to remember that today's youth have many choices when it comes to the foods they eat. Therefore, it is also the responsibility of parents, caregivers, educators, and the community to encourage healthy eating in all of our children.

