

Mission nutrition

Make sure your child is offered, chooses healthy food options

You make sure your kids have a healthy breakfast. You serve a balanced dinner with fresh veggies and fruits. You limit sugary snacks and soft drinks and encourage milk, cheese and yogurt instead.

You're taking all the right steps to ensure your children grow up healthy, but what happens when they head back to school? Does your influence travel with them? Do they have access to healthy options, and if so, do they know how to make a nutritious selection?

"Children and teens have so many choices these days," said Lori Mooney, registered dietician at Columbus Children's Center for Healthy Weight & Nutrition. "It's important that we arm young people with the tools and information they need to make good decisions with regard to nutrition. The choices they make now will likely carry over to adulthood."

With nearly 40 percent of Ohio's third graders overweight or at risk, many schools are introducing new programs and strategies to prevent obesity, including Columbus Children's Hospital Snackwise® Nutrition Rating System.

A first-of-its-kind computerized nutritional tool, Snackwise allows school officials to determine the nutritional value of foods commonly available to students from vending machines, a-la-carte lines or school stores.

School officials input 10 key components posted on the food's nutritional label: total energy, total and saturated fats, fiber, sugars, protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C. Using that information, Snackwise assigns each food a point value that translates into an easy-to-follow color-coded chart.

Foods with the least amount of points are deemed least nutritious and assigned the color red; these foods should be chosen rarely. Snack foods that receive



Photo courtesy of Columbus Children's Hospital

Speak with your children about making healthy food choices.

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Log onto ColumbusParent.com to see a sample of the color-coded Snackwise chart and the nutritional values of some popular snacks.

the highest amount of points, or are rated most nutritious, are colored green to indicate they are the best choices. Snack foods that are moderately nutritious are assigned yellow to remind children to choose these snacks occasionally.

Although Snackwise offers students a simple way to make nutritionally sound decisions, not all schools offer the program. If your school doesn't offer Snackwise, there are steps you can take to make sure your child is offered and chooses wholesome, healthy foods when they're out of your care.

- Pack your child's lunch. Offer a well-balanced meal such as a sandwich with lettuce and tomatoes, carrot sticks, an apple and string cheese. Other options include nuts, low-fat yogurt, cheese or peanut butter crackers, and fruits and berries.

- Pack a snack. Put raisins, trail mix, string cheese or other easy-to-eat snacks in your child's backpack.

- Speak up. Encourage school officials to replace sugary soft drinks and vending-machine snacks with healthy options.

- Teach your children the value of making good food choices. Let them know healthy food options exist and lead by example.

Parents and school officials looking for more information on the Snackwise program can visit ColumbusChildrens.com and search "Snackwise."

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Columbus Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.