

# Vegan Options

## *for* School Lunch Programs

- Advantages for Children's Health
- Meeting USDA Requirements
- Menu Makeovers
- Commodities
- Product Vendors
- Introducing New Options
- Putting Best Practices into Action
- Key Nutrients
- Additional Resources



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“Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes.”

—The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

### Children's Health



High Cholesterol **2** in 10 Children



Overweight or Obese **3** in 10 Children



Will Develop Diabetes **3** in 10 Children

# 1. Children's Health

It can be challenging to keep healthful foods on our children's plates. Yet there has never been a time when good eating habits were as important as they are today. Building a diet with fruits, vegetables, healthful grains, and legumes from a young age will help children prefer those foods throughout their lives.

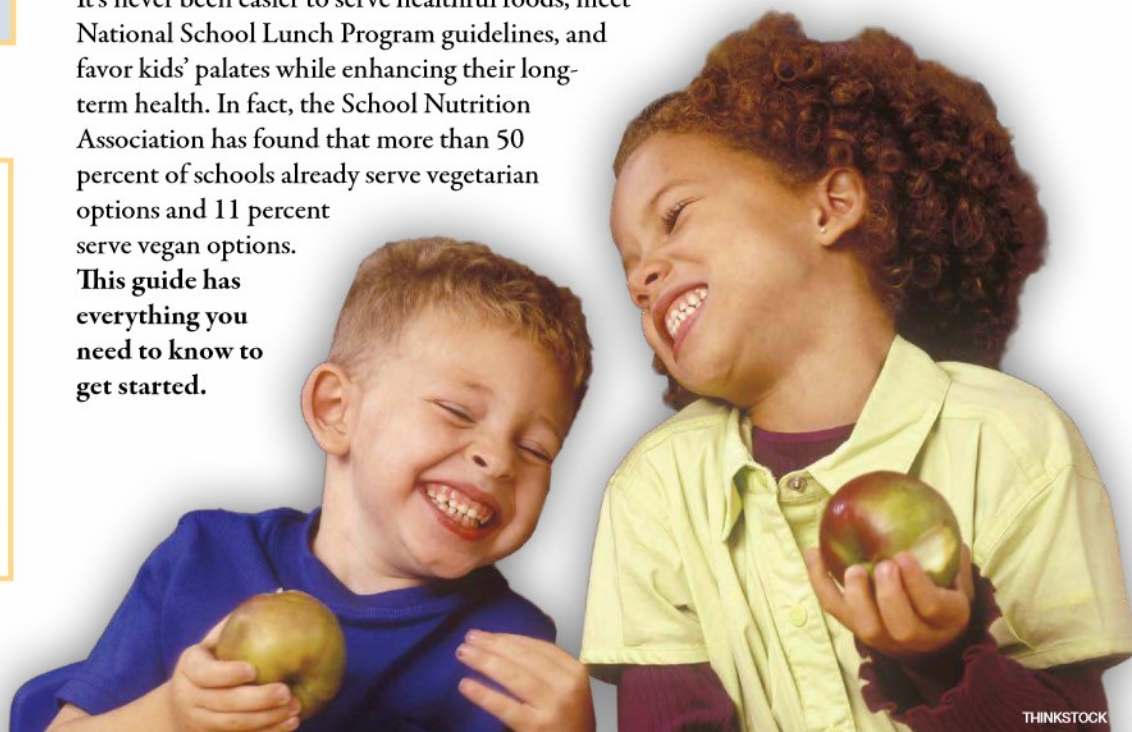
More and more children are gaining excess weight, paving the way for health problems in later life. Twenty-five percent of children ages 5 to 10 years have high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, or other early warning signs of heart disease.<sup>1</sup> Obese children may show signs of heart disease as young as 8 years old, according to an abstract presented at the 2015 American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions.<sup>1</sup>

Health authorities would like to see more healthful, high-fiber foods in children's diets. A great way to do this is to include vegan meals in school lunch programs. These meals are typically high in fiber and important nutrients and low in saturated fat. Animal products are the only source of cholesterol in the diet. Fiber, found only in plant-based foods, helps reduce cholesterol levels. Studies have shown that those following a vegan diet have lower weights, total and LDL-cholesterol levels, and glucose levels, compared with those following omnivorous diets. In addition, they also have lower mortality rates from heart disease and cancer.<sup>2</sup>

Plant-based meals also help meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) requirements. Animal products are the main source of saturated fat in the diet and processed meats and dairy are some of the highest contributors to sodium intake.<sup>3</sup> By offering meals without these products, it is easier to meet sodium and saturated fat targets in school lunch.

It's never been easier to serve healthful foods, meet National School Lunch Program guidelines, and favor kids' palates while enhancing their long-term health. In fact, the School Nutrition Association has found that more than 50 percent of schools already serve vegetarian options and 11 percent serve vegan options.

**This guide has everything you need to know to get started.**



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## 2. Meeting USDA National School Lunch Program Requirements

Meeting the requirements for the NSLP is easy with plant-based foods. The USDA encourages a variety of meat/meat alternates to better meet the dietary needs of vegetarians and culturally diverse groups in schools. Daily and weekly requirements are for lunch only. No meat/meat alternate needs to be served with breakfast. The USDA-approved plant protein products include nut and seed butters, cooked beans and peas, and soy protein.

Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
<b>Meal Pattern</b>	<b>Amount of Food Per Week (Minimum Per Day)</b>		
Meat/Meat Alternates (ounce equivalent)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)	10-12 (2)

There are many meat alternates that can meet NSLP requirements.

Food	Equals 1 ounce equivalent meat alternate
Cooked dry beans or peas	1/4 cup
Tofu—commercially prepared	2.2 ounces or 1/4 cup
Soy yogurt	4.0 fluid ounces or 1/2 cup
Nuts and seeds*	1 ounce
Nut and seed butters	2 tablespoons

\*Nuts or seeds may be used to meet no more than one-half of the meat/meat alternate component with another meat/meat alternate to meet the full requirement.

When tofu is used to produce other meat substitute products, such as burgers and sausages, it can be credited as such as long as the tofu ingredient contains the required 5 grams of protein. Enriched macaroni-type products with fortified protein may be counted as meeting part of the meat and meat alternate requirement. A serving of a finished food served as part of a meal must contribute a minimum of 0.25 ounces of meat or meat alternate to be eligible to count toward the meat/meat alternate requirement.

Including more vegan menu options can be an advantage in meeting NSLP nutrient requirements. Most vegetarian foods are exceptionally low in saturated fat, and most are also low in sodium. Use our chart below to compare the amount of sodium and saturated fat in standard entrees with vegan recipes.

Entree	Sodium	Saturated Fat
Toasted Turkey Ham and Cheese Sandwich*	1198 mg	5g
Vegan Mediterranean Pocket	361 mg	2.16g
Stuffed Crust Whole Grain Pepperoni Pizza*	820 mg	6g
Vegan Tuscan Tomato Pie	370 mg	0.3 g
Beef, Bean, and Cheese Fiesta Burrito*	460 mg	7g
Vegan Baja Bean Tacos	418 mg	0.48g

\*Entrees are from the CN labeled product list.

For more information on NSLP requirements, please see the USDA website: [www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs](http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs).

### Why Not Cheese?

The federal guidelines for school meals require that less than 10 percent of total calories in school lunches come from saturated fat. And cheese is the type of “bad” fat responsible for raising cholesterol levels and increasing the risk for heart disease and Alzheimer’s disease. Dairy protein, which is even more concentrated in cheese, has been linked to allergies, asthma, migraines, arthritis, psoriasis, tendonitis, acne, digestion problems, and more. So skip the cheese on your menu and sub in more high-fiber foods!



Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
<b>Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week</b>			
Min-max calories (kcal)	550-650	600-700	750-850
Saturated fat (% of total calories)	< 10	< 10	< 10
Sodium (mg)	< 640	< 710	< 740

The World Health Organization recently declared processed meats “carcinogenic to humans.”<sup>4</sup> The organization has classified processed meats in the same category as asbestos, tobacco products, and other carcinogens. Check out our online resources to find out what you can do to address this issue in your school.

[PCRM.org/ProcessedMeat](http://PCRM.org/ProcessedMeat)



### 3. Making Over The Menu: Meal Ideas and New Products



#### Healthful Swaps

Here are five healthful swaps to help transform your menu:

Spaghetti with Meat Balls → Powered-Up Pasta	Use lentils or a meat substitute, such as soy crumbles, to make a "meaty sauce."
Beef Tacos and Burritos → Bean Burritos	Fill with beans, soy protein crumbles, rice, and salsa.
Cheeseburgers → Veggie Burger	Made of vegetables and beans or soy protein crumbles, veggie burgers are easy to serve with lettuce and tomato on a bun.
Pepperoni Pizza → White Bean Bruschetta Flat Bread	Setting aside the cheese, replace with a bruschetta topping by adding a hearty amount of beans along with chopped tomatoes and basil.
Deli Sandwich → Hummus Pita	Hummus with sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, and shredded carrots in pita bread or in a wrap.
Hot Dog → Banana Dog	Fill traditional hot dog bun with a banana, load with nut butter and jelly.

#### More Meal Ideas:

- Falafel, a seasoned chickpea patty in pita bread with a variety of toppings
- Vegetarian soups such as lentil, minestrone, or black bean
- Red beans and rice
- Baked potatoes with veggie chili and salsa
- Stir-fry vegetables with tofu or vegan chicken strips over brown rice
- Pasta fagioli with Italian herbs, white beans, and tomatoes

#### Create a Salad Bar

Salad bars are simple, effective ways to provide healthful foods. And here's a tip: Variety is key. The mere presence of a salad bar does not encourage children to boost their fruit and vegetable intake, but salad bars with more items and varied selections succeed very well.<sup>5</sup> So, you'll want to offer a variety of healthy choices every day to help increase traffic to the salad bar. Try these:

• Fresh produce	• Raisins and other dried fruits
• Hummus or other bean dips	• Three bean salad
• Chickpeas, black beans	• Pasta salad
• Nuts/seeds (sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, almonds)	• Grain salads, such as tabbouleh
	• Low-fat, dairy-free salad dressings (Italian or balsamic dressings)

As part of the Let's Move initiative launched by former first lady Michelle Obama, Salad Bars to Schools is a public health effort to increase salad bars in schools throughout the United States. Any K-12 school district in the NSLP is eligible to apply for a grant to receive a salad bar! For details on the application process, and for other helpful tips on salad bars, visit: [www.SaladBars2Schools.org](http://www.SaladBars2Schools.org).

Popular farm-to-school programs can be very helpful as you implement your salad bar. These programs link schools with local farmers to bring produce into cafeterias. To find a farm near you, contact your state's Cooperative Extension. For more information visit: [www.FarmToSchool.org](http://www.FarmToSchool.org).



## 4. Commodities



Many plant-based foods are available through the commodity food program and can be used to create healthful menu items. Availability may depend on demand, so it pays to work with other schools in your area.

You might be surprised at the variety of products available, including: canned, dried, and frozen fruits and vegetables; canned and

dried beans; fresh white russet or sweet potatoes; pasta; rice; and peanut butter. For a complete list of vegetarian USDA commodity foods available for the current school year, visit: [www.FNS.USDA.gov/USDA-Foods/USDA-Foods-Toolkit-Child-Nutrition-Programs](http://www.FNS.USDA.gov/USDA-Foods/USDA-Foods-Toolkit-Child-Nutrition-Programs).

Fresh fruits and vegetables for schools may also be available through the USDA's Department of Defense Fresh Program and USDA Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program. For more information, visit: [www.FNS.USDA.gov/FFVP/FNS-Resources](http://www.FNS.USDA.gov/FFVP/FNS-Resources).

### Check Out the New Products

In response to increasing demand, many food manufacturers provide competitively priced vegetarian foods for schools. Many of these meet the Alternate Protein Product requirements, and even carry Child Nutrition (CN) labels to specify the number of meat alternative equivalents they satisfy. These vegetarian options are both healthful and appealing to children. For example:

- Veggie burgers or hot dogs
- Ready-made burritos
- Veggie barbecue riblets
- Meatless "chicken" tenders
- Vegetarian soups
- Soy yogurt

While heat-and-serve vegetarian products taste great on their own, you can get more mileage out of them and build more variety in your menu by being creative. Try embellishing them the same way you would their meat alternatives, such as a Teriyaki "Chicken" Wrap or Tex-Mex Burgers topped with barbecue sauce.



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## 5. Product Vendors

Many manufacturers produce meat alternatives or vegan-friendly prepared foods that are easy to heat and serve. The following list includes designation of Child Nutrition (CN) labeling and CN Equivalent if applicable.

### Beyond Meat

Product: Lightly seasoned Chicken-Free Strips, Beef-Free Crumble; other frozen meat analogs

Web: [www.BeyondMeat.com](http://www.BeyondMeat.com)

Phone: 866-756-4112

\*\*CN equivalent: 1 ounce of Beyond Meat equals 1 ounce meat alternate.

### Dr. Praeger's

Product: Veggie burgers

Web: [www.DrPraegers.com/Food-Service/](http://www.DrPraegers.com/Food-Service/)

Phone: 1-877-PRAEGER

\*\*CN Labeled: 2 ounce equivalent meat alternate.

### Gardein

Product type: Frozen meat analogs

Web: [www.Gardein.com/Food-Service/](http://www.Gardein.com/Food-Service/)

Phone: 877-305-6777

### Kellogg's

Brand: Gardenburger and Morningstar Farms

Product type: Frozen meat analogs

Web: [www.FAFH.com/Home/Recommendations](http://www.FAFH.com/Home/Recommendations)

Phone: See website for your region's telephone number

\*\* CN labeled products available

### Kikkoman

Brand: Pearl

Product Type: Single serving soy milk

Web: [www.PearlSoymilk.com](http://www.PearlSoymilk.com)

Phone: 800-944-0600

### Kraft Foods

Brand: Boca

Product Type: Frozen meat analogs

Web: [www.KraftFoodservice.com](http://www.KraftFoodservice.com)

Phone: 800-537-9338

### Lightlife Foods

Brand: Lightlife

Product Type: Frozen meat analogs and prepared foods

Web: [www.Lightlife.com](http://www.Lightlife.com)

Phone: 800-SOY-EASY

### Los Cabos—M.C.I. Foods

Product Type: Vegan Burrito

Web: [www.MCIFoods.com](http://www.MCIFoods.com)

Phone: 800-704-4661

\*\*CN Labeled: 2 ounce equivalent meat alternate.

### Tabatchnick Fine Foods, Inc.

Product type: Soups, vegetarian chili

Web: [www.Tabatchnick.com](http://www.Tabatchnick.com)

Phone: 732-247-6668

### Turtle Island Foods

Brand: Tofurky

Product Type: Frozen meat analogs

Web: [www.Tofurkey.com](http://www.Tofurkey.com)

Phone: 800-508-8100

### VeggieLand

Brand: VeggieLand

Product Type: California Veggie Burger, Veggie Wrap

Web: [www.VeggieLand.com](http://www.VeggieLand.com)

Phone: 973-808-1540

\*\*Guarantees meat equivalents based on CN methodology for its products.

### Silk

Product Type: Aseptic or refrigerated soy milk

Web: [www.Silk.com/Products/Learn-More/About-Shelf-Stable](http://www.Silk.com/Products/Learn-More/About-Shelf-Stable)

Phone: 303-635-4636



## 6. Introducing New Options

A Minnesota study showed that overall lunch sales increased after new and healthful items were introduced.<sup>6</sup> However, promotion and student involvement are essential. Here are some methods that other schools have found helpful:

- ✓ Ask students for ideas about what they would like to see on the menu.
- ✓ Hold a meeting with school faculty to make them aware of new menu options and the benefits of including more vegetarian foods. Encourage them to spread the word to students.
- ✓ Announce your menu improvements to the community press. If parents are aware of the new menu items you are offering, they can help encourage children to choose these options.
- ✓ Introduce new foods through a taste-testing event. Make it fun for students by letting them vote for their favorites, or create a competition between grade levels for which group has highest participation in the taste test.
- ✓ Roll out new options using Meatless Mondays, Try-it Tuesdays, or Lean and Green Fridays!
- ✓ Take advantage of special days to try new foods. Whether it is World Vegetarian Day (Oct. 1) or several days in March for National Nutrition Month, special days can highlight health and nutrition.
- ✓ Think creatively about what to call your new menu items. For example, “Zesty Bean Bowl,” sounds much more appealing than “Rice and Beans.”
- ✓ Market and advertise your new menu items in as many ways as possible, using colorful signs and posters, a spot on the morning announcements, or a feature in the school newspaper.



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## 7. Putting Best Practices into Action

### Lee County School District in Fort Myers, Fla.

Lee County School District serves more than 54,000 students a menu filled with fresh fruits, vegetables, and daily vegetarian entrées. Every Friday, each school in the district participates in “Lean and Green Fridays,” where the main entrée is vegetarian and paired with a green vegetable, like steamed broccoli or fresh green beans. Popular Lean and Green meals include pasta spirals topped with marinara sauce and Beyond Meat meatless crumbles and a Fiesta Bowl with vegetables, beans, and salsa.

### DC Central Kitchen

DC Central Kitchen implemented Fresh Feature Friday in a number of DC Public Schools to introduce students to one vegetable made three ways. The winner of this hands-on taste test moves to the lunch line!

### Atlanta Public Schools

Serving more than 50,000 students each day, APS runs an innovative “More Please” campaign, which lets students take a second trip to the salad bar at no extra cost.

### Santa Barbara Unified School District

Chef-inspired favorites in Santa Barbara include four-bean chili verde and veggie pozole with Napa cabbage. They also run five high school mobile cafés which serve creative and freshly prepared entrées like the veggie brown rice bowls with garlic-jalapeno pinto beans.

### Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, Neb.

School principals often encourage students to try healthful options by standing in the lunch line and gesturing to new items. But their real secret to success is that lunches are served with a positive attitude and a side of enthusiasm.



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## 8. Key Nutrients

A plant-based diet has many health advantages. Vegetarians are less likely to be overweight<sup>7,8</sup> and have lower risk of diabetes,<sup>9</sup> heart disease,<sup>10</sup> hypertension,<sup>11</sup> and even some cancers<sup>12</sup> later in life. It's no wonder the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans list vegetarian diets as one of three examples of a healthful dietary pattern.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, vegetarian and vegan children consume more fruits and vegetables, fewer salty and sweet snacks, and less total fat and saturated fat.<sup>14</sup> Vegetarian, including vegan, diets are an effective way to prevent overweight and obesity among children, a healthy start that will follow them into adulthood.<sup>15</sup> Whether a child chooses an occasional vegetarian meal or follows a vegetarian or vegan diet full-time, experts agree that plant-based foods are healthful choices.

**Protein:** Vegetarian and vegan diets provide more than enough protein. While it was once thought that vegetarians had to combine foods in specific ways to get adequate protein, we now know that this is unnecessary. The normal variety of grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits in vegetarian diets provides plenty of protein. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), “protein from a variety of plant foods, eaten during the course of a day, supplies enough of all indispensable (essential) amino acids when caloric requirements are met.”<sup>14</sup> Particularly good protein sources include beans, tofu, and other soy-based products, nuts, seeds, and whole grains, such as oats, barley, and quinoa.

AND also points out that athletes can meet their protein needs on plant-based diets. Because of their naturally higher food intake, athletes consume more protein, as well as more calories.

**Calcium:** Dairy milk is the leading source of saturated fat in children's diets. Calcium is also found in healthful sources such as beans, fortified breads and cereals, raisins, broccoli, and dark leafy greens. Other good calcium sources are fortified plant milks, fortified juices, and tofu.

**Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is activated by the body after exposure to sunlight. If children do not get regular sun exposure, fortified foods such as cereals and rice or soy milks and supplements are available. Vitamin D is also found in all common multiple vitamins.

**Iron:** Diets consisting of vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, and nuts provide adequate iron. In fact, AND notes that “vegetarians generally consume as much iron as, or slightly more than, omnivores.”<sup>14</sup> Vegetarian sources of iron include dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, pasta, rice, soybeans, and chickpeas. Consuming foods rich in vitamin C, such as orange juice, along with iron-rich foods, enhances absorption of iron.

**Vitamin B12:** Unfortified plant foods contain little or no B12. However, all common multiple vitamins contain vitamin B12. The vitamin can also be easily found in fortified cereals, fortified plant milks, and fortified meat analogs.

As AND concludes in its position statement, “...appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes.”<sup>14</sup>

### Offering Nondairy Beverages at Every Meal

Serving nondairy beverages and foods can help meet the needs of all children, including those who are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk and those who prefer not to consume dairy products. Here are some easy choices:

- Water
- Unsweetened beverages
- Soy milk
- Rice milk
- Almond milk



## 9. Additional Resources

**The Coalition for Healthy School Food** ([www.HealthySchoolFood.org](http://www.HealthySchoolFood.org)) provides information on efforts in New York state to promote plant-based diets and provides guidelines for school foods and vegetarian recipes. Contact: 607-272-1154 or e-mail [info@healthyschoolfood.org](mailto:info@healthyschoolfood.org).

**Humane Society of the United States** runs a Meatless Monday program and offers recipes and support for schools. Resources including their K-12 tool kit can be found here: <http://www.HumaneSociety.org/assets/pdfs/farm/meatless-monday-toolkit-for.pdf>.

**Lean and Green Kids** ([www.LeanandGreenKids.org](http://www.LeanandGreenKids.org)) is a children's eco-health organization teaching kids (and grown-ups) about the benefits of choosing whole, organic, plant-based meals. Visit their website for recipe ideas, nutrition education enrichment tools, and more.

**United Soybean Board** ([www.SoyFoods.org/school-food-service-professionals](http://www.SoyFoods.org/school-food-service-professionals)) offers information, menu plans, and recipes to help schools introduce soy products. Contact: 1-800-825-5769.

**Vegan in Volume** ([www.VRG.org/catalog/volume.htm](http://www.VRG.org/catalog/volume.htm)) by Chef Nancy Berkoff, R.D. is a cookbook full of plant-based institutional-size recipes. Available for sale.

**Vegetarian Resource Group** ([www.VRG.org](http://www.VRG.org)) offers many tips and recipes for school food service. VRG's quarterly journal has a "Foodservice Update" section which is also available online. Contact: 410-366-8343 or e-mail [vrg@vrg.org](mailto:vrg@vrg.org).

**Physicians Committee** ([www.HealthySchoolLunches.org](http://www.HealthySchoolLunches.org)) offers institutional-size recipes, best practices and tips for food service directors and parents, and the opportunity to be paired with a mentor who has been successful with adding vegan options into the menu. Contact: 202-686-2210 or e-mail [info@healthyschoollunches.org](mailto:info@healthyschoollunches.org).



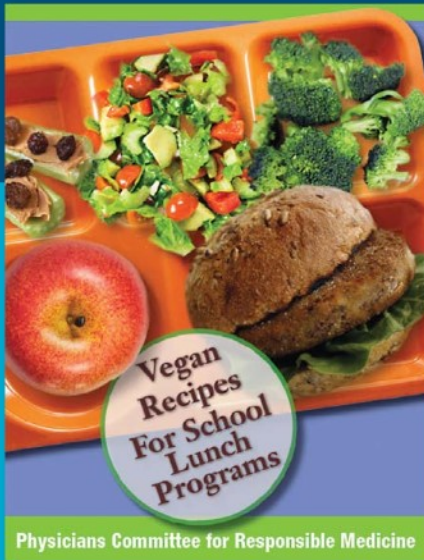
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For more information about vegan options for school lunches, please visit:  
[www.HealthySchoolLunches.org](http://www.HealthySchoolLunches.org) where you can find more resources!



**Vegan Recipes For School Lunch Programs**

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

**Drop the Hot Dog: Removing Processed Meat from School Meals**



Tools and Resources for School Programs  
 PhysiciansCommittee  
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**Vegan Quantity Recipes**

for School Lunch Programs

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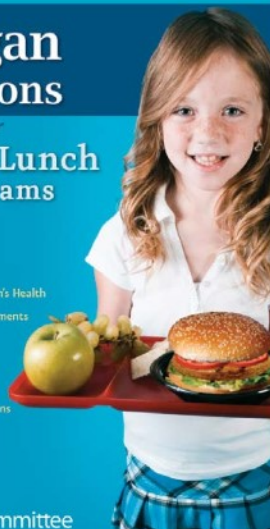
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**Best Practices Guide for Increasing Plant-Based Options in the National School Lunch Program**



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**The State of the School Lunch Tray**

**Children's Health**

High Cholesterol	2 in 10 Children
Overweight or Obese	3 in 10 Children
Will Develop Diabetes	3 in 10 Children

**Nutrition Trends**

Eat 5 Daily Servings of Fruits and Veggies	2 in 10 Children
Consume Excess Saturated Fat	6 in 10 Children
Eat School Lunches	6 in 10 Children
Meats, Dairy, Oils	65% USDA Lunch \$
Fruits, Veggies, Whole Grains, Nuts and Seeds	35% USDA Lunch \$

**Prevention**

Obesity-Related Deaths	2 in 10 Adults
Prevented Through Lifestyle Change	6 in 10 Common Deaths

Healthy School Lunches: Let's Move Forward | Physicians Committee



For more great menu ideas, check out the winners of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine's annual Golden Carrot Award:  
[www.healthyschoollunches.org/carrot/index.cfm](http://www.healthyschoollunches.org/carrot/index.cfm)




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