



Ontario Home Economics Association

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Back to School with New Nutrition Standards

by Amy Snider-Whitson, P.H.Ec.

While students and teachers wind-down from another busy school year, many others are gearing-up for back-to-school with new nutrition standards come September.

Childhood obesity rates have tripled in the last 25 years while diabetes is on the increase. Clearly something has gone wrong. Improving health is a major goal and the provincial government has stepped in with legislation geared toward making healthy eating more accessible in Ontario schools.

The Ontario School Nutrition Standards (PPM 150) were released in January of 2010, setting out the nutrition criteria for all foods and beverages sold in publicly-funded elementary and secondary schools. All schools must be in compliance with these guidelines by September 2011.

The new standards - designed to promote more nutritious choices on school menus - essentially divide foods sold in schools into three major categories:

1. **Sell Most** - At least 80% of products sold must conform to these criteria. These foods are considered healthier options with higher levels of essential nutrients while containing lower amounts of fat, sugars and/or sodium.
2. **Sell Least** - Up to 20% of the food items sold can be in this category. These items may have higher amounts of fat, sugars and/or sodium than those in the 'Sell Most' category.
3. **Not Permitted for Sale** - Some food items will no longer be available for sale in schools. They are considered to have little nutritional value and are typically high in fat, sugar and/or sodium. As a result, the following foods will be removed from school cafeterias and vending machines:
 - all deep fried foods;
 - high fat pastries such as croissants, donuts, pies and most cookies and squares;
 - frozen desserts high in sugar and fat such as ice cream, frozen confectionary and popsicles/freezies that are not made from 100% juice;
 - meats that contain more than 14 g of fat and 480 mg sodium per serving such as chicken wings, bacon, ribs, hot dogs and pepperoni;
 - candy, chocolate, coated nuts, licorice, energy bars and gum;
 - caffeinated drinks, energy or sports drinks and soft drinks.

Schools are allowed up to ten special event days per school year where foods sold are exempt from these standards. That's essentially one day per month in the school calendar.

Catering companies and cafeteria staff that prepare food for schools and daycares are required to source nutritious products that fit the new guidelines and to adopt preparation methods that limit added fat and calories. In preparation for these legislated standards, several manufacturers that sell to schools have been making changes to their product formulations or launching new products to comply with the new regulations.

The question is - will the new standards actually make students choose healthier foods? The new standards do not regulate what students can bring in their lunch bags. With the exception of special meals, lunches for elementary school children are typically packed by parents. Providing good nutrition can be a struggle for parents who also need to balance acceptance and convenience.

At the high school level, students can simply leave school property to get their French fry or pizza fix at the nearest franchise. High schools in British Columbia and Nova Scotia that have already initiated stricter nutrition policies have shown as much as a 30% reduction in cafeteria sales. Conversely, convenience stores in those areas have seen increased sales.

Certainly, the new nutrition guidelines are an important start. Getting students excited about healthy eating is an equally vital step. Seeking a motivating strategy could be a role for Parent Involvement Committees.

Strategies to connect students with healthy eating could include:

- building on curriculum and programs that involve students in healthy meal planning and food preparation such as Family Studies education and student-run cafeterias to create a better understanding of the importance of good nutrition;
- starting community school gardens to teach students to grow nutritious fruits and vegetables;
- motivating students to choose nutritious food by offering 'healthy school' incentives that sponsor special events or sports teams;
- encouraging students to stay at lunchtime for fun, student-run social activities in the cafeteria;
- educating parents/guardians and kids on how to pack a healthy lunch with fact sheets, seminars, or family cooking classes;
- making healthy eating a school priority where a good example is set by teachers and other role models who emphasize that a nutritious diet can lead to better academic and athletic performance and overall well-being.

To fight childhood obesity and improve the health of young people, we must work together to continue meaningful communication and collaboration between government, health experts, food service operators, educators, parents and students. Together we can make changes that will positively impact the health of generations to come. Read about the new guidelines: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/150.html>

Amy Snider-Whitson, P.H.Ec. is a Toronto-based Professional Home Economist and President of the Test Kitchen Inc. Her expertise includes recipe development, nutrition research and analysis and food trend reporting. She is President of the Ontario Home Economics Association.

-30-

Ontario Home Economics Association (OHEA) a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life. **For further information, please contact:** Ontario Home Economics Association, 14 Totten Place, Woodstock, ON N4S 8G7 Tel/Fax: 519-290-1843 Email: nancyohea@rogers.com Website: www.ohea.on.ca