

Lunch Line Logic

While school cafeteria menus have come a long way from Sloppy Joes and frozen pizza, it's hard to know what your children are eating once they enter those hallowed halls. We brought in a nutritionist to study a week's worth of school lunches and give her best advice on navigating the lunch line. **BY KRISTAN ZIMMER**



BUY

Monday

Expert advice: This meal packs a big punch: calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron, beta-carotene, vitamin B complex, vitamin C and vitamin K. Potassium reduces blood pressure and counters the sodium, while the lycopene in tomatoes protects against skin damage and prostate cancer. The flavonoid compounds found in carrots protect from some cancers. The apples in the crisp provide fiber and antioxidants.

BRING

Tuesday

Expert advice: This might be a good day to bring a lunch. The more colorful the food, the more nutrients it has. Broccoli and pear are good sources of vitamin C, but there's not enough color here. Ask the school if they use white or dark meat in the nuggets, and whether they're fried.

What to pack: Many store-bought nuggets use white meat with whole grain breadcrumbs. Bake them and send in a thermos.

BUY

Wednesday

Expert advice: Baked ziti provides needed calcium from the cheese, lycopene from the tomato sauce and carbohydrates for energy. Green and yellow squash are filled with carotenoids, antioxidants, vitamin C, fiber and folate, to protect against cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The apple is a great source of phytonutrients (natural compounds that regulate blood sugar). Skip the garlic bread if it has butter or oil.

BRING

Thursday

Expert advice: There are three major sources of saturated fat in this meal: beef, cheese and sour cream. Although rice and lentils are high in fiber, protein and magnesium, and pineapple offers vitamin C, the beef tacos counteract any benefits from the side dishes. **What to pack:** A chicken or turkey wrap with lettuce and tomato. Add salsa and avocado slices or guacamole, for less saturated fat. Slice veggies on the side.

BUY

Friday

Expert advice: A typical slice of pizza has about 400 calories and about half the day's value of saturated fat, but it also has lycopene in the tomato sauce and calcium in the cheese. Have one slice with a mixed salad and some melon slices (vitamins A and C, as well as antioxidants). It's best to eat the salad first since it's lowest in calories. Your kids will fill up with healthy veggies and stay satisfied after just one piece of pizza.