

Additives in the canteen

Canteen foods may be 'low fat, low salt, low sugar' but Jacqui Deighan asks: What about the preservatives, flavours and artificial colours that food suppliers have add to their recipes?

Sausage roll anyone? What about a hot dog followed by a can of soft drink? Some chicken nuggets? Or a bag of chips and an ice cream?

Several years ago, there was a very heartening focus on school canteen menus and the need to make some real changes to school fare. We had federal and state governments implementing strategies and pouring money into school food education programs, we had television programs on the subject (think Jamie Oliver). School food was the subject of countless talk show programs and filled the pages of our daily papers. Everyone agreed that something had to be done. Our children deserved better and we could do better.

But the steam seems to have evaporated. No-one is talking about healthy school canteens anymore and it rarely makes the papers let alone television. While many schools are making an enormous effort to prepare and promote healthier foods, there are many more that are barely making the token gesture.

Several states have formulated strategies to promote and facilitate the provision of nutritious foods in school canteens, such as the Fresh Tastes program in NSW and Go For Your Life in Victoria. But, though the guidelines and regulations that have been implemented no doubt encourage the promotion of fresh foods, they also allow an incredible amount of 'dead' foods.

In the scramble to be accepted under the new



guidelines, many food manufacturers have come up with a plethora of products that are "low fat, low salt and low sugar". All acceptable and all pouring over the counters of school canteens.

However, it is not always easy to make a tempting product when all the taste has been removed. Enter the additive brigade! For some reason, food additives have slipped under the net and children are now consuming a cocktail of food additives, including preservatives, flavours and artificial colours, all in the name of good health.

Many canteens removed sugary soft drink from their counters, only to replace them with artificially sweetened ones. Visit many school canteens now and almost all of the products

that were previously struck off the list as being unacceptable have been replaced with exactly the same product but in a "low fat, low salt, low sugar" version. While it may be a step in the right direction to decrease these components in canteen foods, we are not really making any headway in improving our kid's health if we are still loading up their bodies with heavily processed foods. Yes, it can be a challenge to get kids eating good food. Yes, healthy canteens can be a challenge to school profits and yes, preparing real food requires lots of work. But surely our kids are worth it?

There is no doubt that the ultimate responsibility for a child's health rests with parents but schools can play a major role in supporting or undermining it. Forget the chips, pies, confectionary and ice cream. Bring on the real food and let's get back to basics and provide our kids with food that will not only help them learn in the classroom but will teach them important lessons for life.



Jacqui Deighan runs food education programs in schools throughout Victoria and offers food education resources nationally. Visit www.naturalkitchenstrategies.com.au

A Special for Education Today Readers!

Learn How To Reduce The Stress In Your Life
And Find 25% More Free Time

PLUS

**Free Book: About Time for Teaching –
120 Time Saving Tips For Teachers**

WORTH \$30

We have negotiated a special deal for our readers with Robyn Pearce at www.gettingagrip.com. You can use her world-leading teaching on time management to **reduce the stress** in your life by managing your time better and learning how to beat the Paper War.

Buy the Education Today Stress Buster Kit of three books from the Getting a Grip series – *Time*, *Paper War* plus *Leadership* and receive a **FREE** copy of *About Time for Teaching – 120 Time Saving Tips For Teachers*, worth \$30.00.

Order online now at www.gettingagrip.com/EducationTodaySpecial
See the full range of life improving products at www.gettingagrip.com/

