

[IMAGE]

## Kudos to the Lunch Lady

By Editorial Staff

School lunches have been under fire for years, with critics pointing to what is too often limited nutrition high on carbs, sugars and sodium, and low on whole grains, vegetables and lean protein. But that all changed in 2012, when new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rules took effect mandating more whole grains, less sodium, saturated fat and trans fat, daily fruits / vegetables, fat-free / low-fat milk options, and calorie minimums / maximums for meals, among other stipulations. And guess what? A recent study suggests the rules are actually *working*.

The study, which used three middle schools and three high schools in a Washington state school district as a sample, compared nutritional values of school lunches – and the lunch choices students made – before and after the new rules took effect. According to findings, meals prepared in the 16 months after adoption of the rules contained increases in calcium, vitamins A and C, iron, fiber and protein compared to meals prepared in the 15 months prior; and nearly as many children participated in the meal program after changes were made.

The lesson to be learned, both at school and at home: It might seem like a hassle, but teaching good nutrition has a big payoff if you give it a chance. As the authors of the study stated: "Food policy in the form of improved nutrition standards was associated with the selection of foods that are higher in nutrients that are of importance in adolescence and lower in energy density. ... meal standards effectively changed the quality of foods selected by children."

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