



The ABC's of Healthy Kids

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, students are flunking healthy eating. Less than 20 percent of school children eat the recommended daily servings of fruit, vegetables and whole grains, and only 30 percent consume three servings of dairy each day.

In Michigan, 83 percent of school-age children eat fewer than five fruits and vegetables and drink less than three glasses of milk per day, and 70 percent don't attend daily physical education classes (2005 *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey*).

According to a recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, one out of three American adolescents is physically unfit, putting them at increased risk of heart disease as they get older. Based on the study's results, researchers estimate 7.5 million adolescents nationwide, age 12-19, are unfit.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that one in three U.S. children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless they improve their diets and start exercising more.

Twenty-five percent of Michigan high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. (2003 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey). This is an alarming trend, given that 70 percent of overweight adolescents have a chance of becoming overweight adults. (U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services).

Since kids spend more than half of their day in school, it's important they get key nutrients their growing bodies need while there. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends school vending machines provide options such as lowfat white or flavored milk, water and 100 percent fruit juices instead of sweetened drinks. (*Pediatrics*, January 2004)

The National Institutes of Health defines osteoporosis as a pediatric disease with geriatric consequences. Children can develop bones that will last a lifetime with daily weight bearing exercise and a balanced diet, which should include calcium-rich foods such as lowfat milk, cheese and yogurt.

Numerous studies show a link between eating breakfast and better academic performance in school age children. A compilation of more than 40 studies found students who eat breakfast have better school attendance, improved test scores, superior nutrition habits and are less likely to be overweight. (*The American Dietetic Association*, January 2005)

What's Being Done

The federal government is requiring that schools have a wellness policy in place by the start of the 2006 school year to address the epidemic of overweight and obese children. Local school districts are required to set individual goals for nutrition education, physical activity, school-based activities and nutrition standards for foods available on each school campus.