

# Junk Food Should Be Banned in Schools

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*Should Junk Food Be Sold in Schools?* , 2011

Will Dunham, "Expert Panel Urges Junk Food Ban in Schools," Reuters, April 25, 2007. Copyright © 2007 Reuters. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

Will Dunham is a staff writer for Reuters.

Current guidelines for foods sold alongside official school meals have been in place since the 1970s but they need to be updated. An Institute of Medicine expert panel recommends that lawmakers update guidelines to limit foods to specific whole grains, low-fat dairy, and fruit and vegetable options. In addition, schools should no longer sell sodas or other drinks with added sugar, and they also should prohibit the sale of caffeinated beverages. Abiding by these recommendations may help curb the rising rates of obesity and related health problems among schoolchildren. Because schoolchildren consume a high percentage of their daily caloric intake during the school day, they should have the highest-quality nutritional choices available to them at these times.

Sugary drinks, fatty chips and gooey snack cakes should be banned from U.S. schools in the face of rising childhood obesity fueled by those junk foods, an expert panel said on Wednesday in a report requested by Congress.

The Institute of Medicine panel proposed nutritional standards more restrictive than current government rules for foods and drinks sold outside regular meal programs in cafeterias, vending machines and school stores in elementary, middle and high schools.

They promote fruits, vegetables, whole grains and nonfat or low-fat dairy products and seek limits on calories, saturated fat, salt and sugar. The panel opposed caffeinated products due to possible harmful effects like headaches and moodiness.

The proposals would banish most potato and corn chips, candies, cheese curls, snack cakes such as Twinkies, "sports drinks" such as Gatorade, sugary sodas and iced teas and punches made with minimal fruit juice.

School campuses should be an overall healthy eating environment.

A 15-member panel headed by Dr. Virginia Stallings of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia crafted standards applying to items not part of federally sponsored meal programs, which already meet some nutrition guidelines. They do not restrict bagged lunches or snacks children bring to school.

"Because foods and beverages available on the school campus also make up a significant proportion of the daily calorie intake, they should contribute to a healthful diet. And school campuses should be an overall healthy eating environment," Stallings told reporters.

The Institute of Medicine provides advice on health issues to U.S. policymakers. These recommendations came at the request of Congress.

The American Beverage Association trade group said the industry already was changing the type of products

available in schools to reduce calories and portion size, and had agreed to voluntary guidelines on items sold in schools.

## Rising Obesity

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Consumer advocates called the proposals vastly superior to existing Agriculture Department standards dating to the 1970s for foods sold alongside official school meals, and asked Congress to embrace them.

"They're recommending very strongly that schools no longer sell junk food and sugary drinks, and that none of the foods sold undermine children's diet and health. And that's really important these days because of the rising obesity rates," said Margo Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest advocacy group.

Sen. Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat sponsoring a bill to toughen the existing government rules, said unenforceable voluntary guidelines by industry are not enough.

The panel proposed two categories of foods and beverages that can be sold in schools based on grade level.

One category should be allowed at all grade levels during school and after-school activities and should provide at least one serving of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, or nonfat or low-fat dairy.

Examples include whole fruits, raisins, carrot sticks, whole-grain cereals, some multi-grain tortilla chips, some granola bars, some nonfat yogurt, plain water, skim and 1 percent fat milk, soy drinks and 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices.

A second category should be available only to high school students after regular school hours, including baked potato chips, whole-wheat crackers, graham crackers, pretzels, caffeine-free diet soda and seltzer water.

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## Further Readings

### Books

- Hank Cardello *Stuffed: An Insider's Look at Who's (Really) Making America Fat*. New York: Ecco, 2009.
- Ann Cooper *Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children*. New York: Harper, 2007.
- Julie Lautenschlager *Food Fight! The Battle over the American Lunch in Schools and the Workplace*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006.
- Susan Levine *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
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- Marion Nestle *What to Eat: An Aisle-by-Aisle Guide to Savvy Food Choices and Good Eating*. New York: North Point Press, 2006.
- Janet Poppendieck *Free for All: Fixing School Food in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.
- Michele Simon *Appetite for Profit: How the Food Industry Undermines Our Health and How to Fight Back*.

New York: Nation Books, 2006.

- Michael K. Stone *Smart by Nature: Schooling for Sustainability*. Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 2009.
- Alice Waters *Edible Schoolyard: A Universal Idea*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2008.
- Walter C. Willett *Eat, Drink and Be Healthy: The Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating*. New York: Free Press, 2005.

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- Sheila Fleischhacker "Food Fight: The Battle over Redefining Competitive Foods," *Journal of School Health*, March 2007.
- Ellen J. Fried and Michele Simon "The Competitive Food Conundrum: Can Government Regulations Improve School Food?" *Duke Law Journal*, April 2007.
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- Katharine Quarmby "Grease Is the Word," *The New Statesman*, February 20, 2006.
- Meabh Ritchie "Naked Lunch Box," *Times Educational Supplement*, March 26, 2010.
- Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach "Do School Lunches Contribute to Childhood Obesity?" *Journal of Human Resources*, Summer 2009.
- Anastasia M. Snelling, Casey Korba, and Alyvia Burkey "The National School Lunch and Competitive Food Offerings and Purchasing Behaviors of High School Students," *Journal of School Health*, December 2007.
- Mary Story, Karen M. Kaphingst, and Simone French "The Role of Schools in Obesity Prevention," *The Future of Children*, Spring 2006.
- Marilyn Swanson "Eating Healthier in School," *Food Technology*, September 2006.
- Deborah Lau Whelan "Let Them Eat Kale: With America's Kids in Danger of Becoming Obese, a Growing Number of Schools Are Thinking Outside the Lunchbox," *School Library Journal*, June 2008.

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### Source Citation:

"Junk Food Should Be Banned in Schools" by Will Dunham. *Should Junk Food Be Sold In Schools?* Norah Piehl, Ed. At Issue Series. Greenhaven Press, 2011. Will Dunham, "Expert Panel Urges Junk Food Ban in Schools," Reuters, April 25, 2007. Copyright © 2007 Reuters. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

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